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**Rethinking
AUTHORSHIP**

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Ava Gardner 1922-1990

Rethinking **AUTHORSHIP**

We are pleased to be editing this issue on the subject of authorship. In the wake of theoretical and critical developments in the last 20 years, the

notion of authorship has been banished along with evaluative criticism. We are not suggesting here that auteur theory be revived as it was

conceived initially in the late '50s and through the '60s; the author is not isolated from a social and political context and a work is never wholly attributable to the artist's individual genius. Nevertheless, as obvious as this now seems, the Barthesian notion that the "author is written" in all its manifestations is, today, untenable and in need of revision. One can acknowledge an artist's *intention* and *awareness* without negating the influence of ideology and cultural norms. We do think, however, that the concept of authorship is useful both in terms of aesthetics and politics. Aside from discussions of style, the term implies that people are responsible for the works they create and that art can investigate critically, and make reference to social concerns. Art does not reproduce automatically the current vagaries of the dominant ideology.

Having said this, we would like to see the discussion expand beyond the rigid confines of a single author/creator, and beyond the insistence that only the director merits the attribution of author. The complexities of collaborative authorship have yet to be investigated. Clearly stars, script-writers, cinematographers etc., significantly contribute to and inform the work of art, and can, at times, subvert an intended project.

We contest the hypocritical premise underpinning the contentions that denies the author any conscious intervention in the work; instead, the critic appropriates the omniscient position from the author. This self-flattering elitism denigrates both the artist and the spectator who are in fact (potentially, at least) as intelligent as the critic.

Finally, we feel that the directors and films included in this issue address contemporary concerns. The fact that a number of these films were produced over a period of 60 years or more does not diminish their significance and value. Too often contemporary works are privileged over Hollywood studio films because of their seeming modernity. We contend that older films, like older books or pieces of music, can still engage and are not exhausted by previous readings (particularly when many of these lack any political awareness).

One last note: the portraits of the actors included on the outside and inside covers, and this editorial, are dedicated to their memory. They remind us of the extraordinary talents and creative sensibilities of these performers.

Florence Jacobowitz
Richard Lippe



Barbara Stanwyck 1907-1990

CREATIVITY AND E

by Robin Wood

For Simon, my son, from whom I have learnt so much

To surround anything, however monstrous or ridiculous, with an air of mystery, is to invest it with a secret charm, and power of attraction which to the crowd is irresistible. False priests, false prophets, false doctors, false patriots, false prodigies of every kind, veiling their proceedings in mystery, have always addressed themselves at an immense advantage to the popular credulity, and have been, perhaps, more indebted to that resource in gaining and keeping for a time the upper hand of Truth and Common Sense, than to any half-dozen items in the whole catalogue of imposture.

Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*.

This article began as a very modest project, both in length and ambition: during a course on *film noir* I screened, in consecutive weeks, *The Big Heat* and *Kiss Me Deadly*; I became interested in the many parallels between the two films, and, as a direct consequence, in what seemed the importance of making certain discriminations between them; I then decided to work up my notes into a short article. At the same time, however, I became conscious of a certain uneasiness, as if the simple exercise I was undertaking were somehow suspect or invalid. This led, in turn, to some wider ranging meditations on the function of criticism and what has become of it during the past two decades, accompanied by a kind of indignation that I should allow myself to feel guilty for trying to fulfil that function. F.R. Leavis consistently saw evaluation as the ultimate aim and justification of criticism. I still think he was right. This belief has survived over 20 years of theoretical positions that have regarded evaluation as either superfluous, unimportant, or actively reprehensible. The opening of a new decade provides an appropriate moment for defending it.

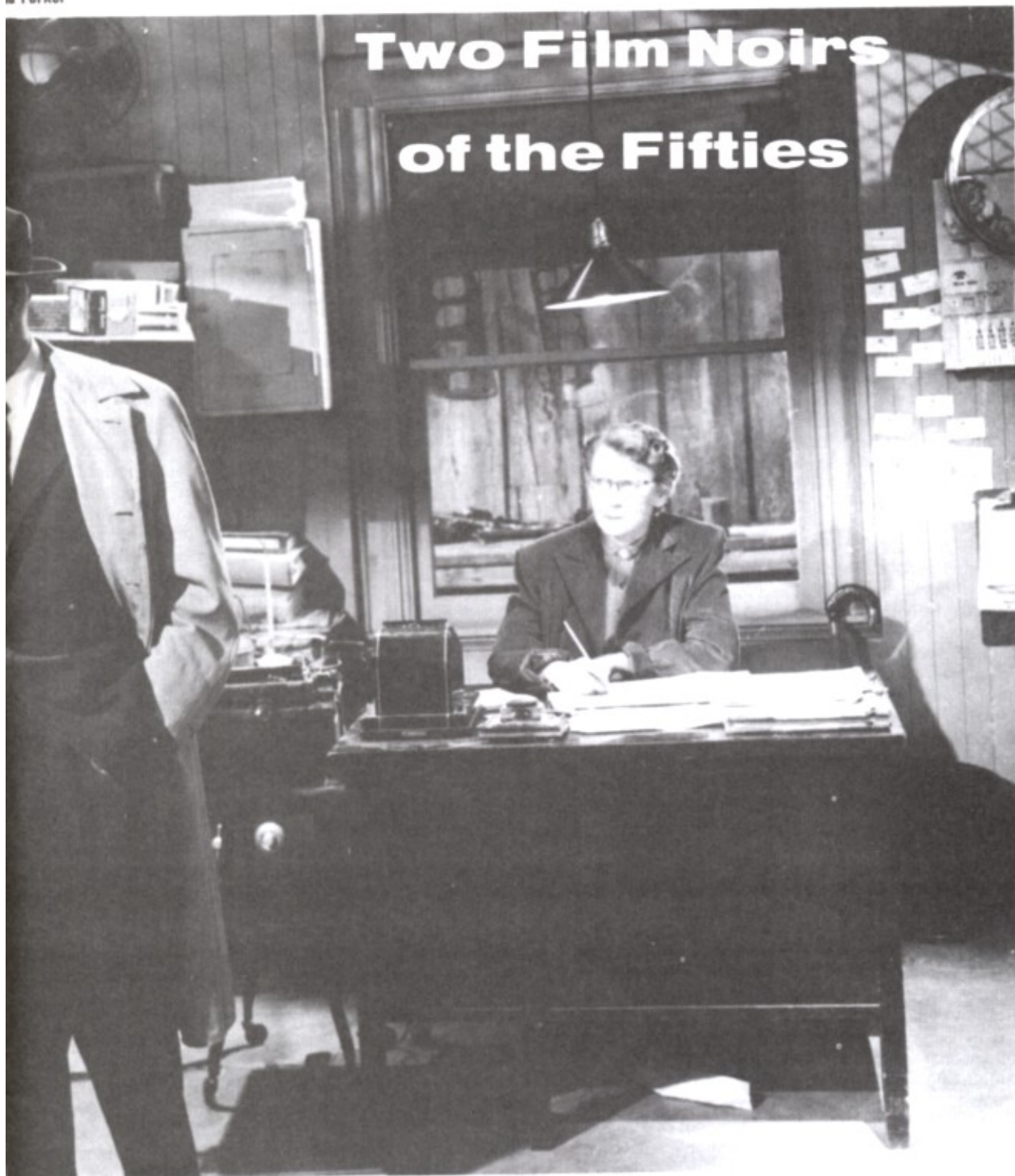
Hostility to evaluation (at least, seriously argued hostility) begins with *Movie* in the early '60s. The original team of founders/editors/writers were quite explicit about this; when I wrote for the magazine I was very conscious of warily slipping in value-judgements, testing the ground to see how far I dared go. My name has consistently been linked to the early *Movie* and its critical practice, and certainly I wrote for it often, but although I remain proud of the connection I never felt a part of its critical core. That I was a frequent contributor is due more to the generosity and tolerance of its founding members, who found they could peacefully coexist with me, than to any sense of comfortably shared critical principles. They viewed Leavis with considerable mistrust. *Movie's* rejection of evaluation always seemed to me somewhat rhetorical, more apparent than real. It seemed based on an honourable but misguided notion of the 'democratic': to offer an explicit value-judgement was to attempt to force that on readers, an act of coercion, and the critic then became a kind of dictator of norms. Instead, it was the critic's task to *describe*, as accurately as possible; the reader, his/her own perceptions fortified or corrected by this 'accurate' description, would then be in a position to reach an enlightened

The Big Heat: Dan Seymour/Atkins Glenn Ford/Dave Bannion, Edith Evans



/ALUATION

by Parker



response to the work in question. Such was the rationale. The fact remains that the *Movie* critics only described films that they loved (apparently a description of a film you disliked would be biased and misleading, a regrettable weakness from which 'positive' descriptions were somehow mysteriously immune): their descriptions, while usually scrupulously 'accurate' in terms of the factual information they conveyed, plot, camera-style, editing, etc., were, when they were worth reading, animated by that love. The evaluation was there, but pretending it wasn't: invisible, under the cloak of 'objectivity.'

Essentially, *Movie* criticism retained its links with the traditional function of art, as it has always (with a very wide range of specific cultural/historical variations) been perceived and experienced. By the end of the decade those links had been brutally shattered and evaluation declared either retrograde or merely beside the point. I had better at this stage define what I take the traditional function of art to have been (and what for most of us it still is, all intimations to the contrary). Perhaps I should write 'functions,' in the plural, though the various partly distinguishable functions intricately interact, merge into one another. First, then, there is the simple function of giving pleasure, the forms of 'pleasure' ranging from casual amusement to the most intense religious exaltation, the varieties of pleasure asked of art, in any particular time and place, depending upon cultural/historical specificity. The pleasure given by art is (potentially at least) extremely complex. There is the pleasure of recognition and familiarity, always reassuring (at lowest, the enjoyment of a joke that flatters one's own prejudices); there is the pleasure of novelty, of difference, of being told something we didn't already know or had never thought. It seems probable that the richest works of art developed out of an interaction between those two phenomena (the operas of Mozart and the plays of Shakespeare would be obvious examples). One of the finest pleasures of art is that of extending and expanding one's own experience, by growing to understand and embrace other people, other sensibilities, other cultures, the expansion of our own emotional and intellectual potential. I can testify to the crucial importance to me — growing up in an oppressive, emotionally and intellectually constricting, British middle-class environment — of discovering, during my adolescence, classical music. Whole worlds of experience suddenly opened up to me, accessible though previously unimaginable: the successive discoveries — Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Stravinsky, Bach, Mozart — completely haphazard, accompanied by no sense of cultural determination or historical background, totally transformed my life, awakening me to the sense of human potential beyond anything that my immediate environment recognized or could cope with. I am glad no one informed me at that time that all I was experiencing were various assemblages of culturally constructed signifiers. Central to all these forms of pleasure is the sense of sharing, of participation and identification: learning, often slowly and painfully, to share the experience of the maker or makers of the work, and to identify imaginatively with that experience.

Obviously, the experience of sharing, of participation, of identification (which we know can never be perfect, always coloured by our own subjectivity) depends upon a strong sense of personal authorship. With the rise of semiotics, personal authorship — or individual creativity — was declared to be no more than a fatuous illusion: works of art are not products of the individual's drive to create, but of ideology. As soon as one accepts this, the whole traditional function of art as I have described it collapses. The problem is that it is

not easy to accept — or even to *grasp* — the function that is supposed to have replaced it. A work of art is not — we are now to believe — produced by the artist's desire to satisfy her/his creative impulses and share experiences, attitudes, values, with others; it consists merely of a collection of signifiers (preconstructed, seemingly, by the culture) more or less intricately combined. The organic has been replaced by the mechanistic, the artist struggling to comprehend, cope with, and if possible resolve urgent problems of living has been replaced by a child building a structure with a mechano set. It seems that we should not even express a preference for one of these structures over another: if evaluation is 'out,' then presumably the implication is that all such structures are of identical value, for if their value is *not* identical why are we supposed to find the qualitative differences not worth discussing? The question of function remains somewhat obscure: if it is not what we had supposed it to be, then what *is* it? Why have we been so stupid as to allow ourselves to become emotionally involved with a set of preconstructed signs? Why have people like Beethoven and Van Gogh been so stupid as to believe they were producing personal statements that also had cultural significance, that spoke for both themselves and their culture? I have not seen this question tackled within the semiotic tradition, perhaps because the implicit answer to it would seem slightly absurd were it to be spelt out: 'works of art' (mechanistic, predetermined) are produced in order to give semioticians (superior, knowing, *not* predetermined) at best the opportunity to deconstruct the ideology of their culture, at worst the opportunity to show off.

It has come to seem to me but another manifestation of the incredible sickness of our civilisation. *Are* we trapped in a universal death wish? — Do we really all *want* to be dead? On the one hand the building of nuclear power, the pollution of the environment, the spread of conservatism with all its concomitants — the endorsement of wealth, the proliferation of poverty, the deliberate erosion of women's rights, native American rights, the sharp increase of racism (all of which go together in intricate interconnection); on the other (in so far as it still matters — having complacently accepted its social role of 'the academic' it has forfeited much of its significance), the perverse denial by intellectuals of everything that *fundamentally* matters, that gives life meaning, the only force that could rejuvenate and transform the civilisation: creativity. When I first encountered the semiotics movement (in England in the early '70s, when semiology became the official methodology of *Screen*), it seemed — although perversely abstruse, mystificatory and jargon-ridden — genuinely progressive and political. Today, I understand that there are university courses in 'postmodernist' semiotics that are explicitly anti-feminist and anti-Marxist, and that teach the new generation of potential revolutionaries that nothing can be done and all action is meaningless. Within the present cultural circumstances, to give one's students the sense that they can't change anything is probably the vilest crime any teacher can commit. But even aside from what I charitably assume are atypical aberrations, who really, in academic circles, cares any more, since the decisive moment when we learnt that everything can be deconstructed? It gives us a nice, secure, impregnable position: Everything is mechanistic, everything is determined, so we can sit back and enjoy our yuppie affluence, meanwhile churning out scholarly papers that pay dutiful lipservice to feminism and political liberation, but prove ultimately that everything is really hopeless and we can all sit comfortably on our fat asses mourning the pity of it all and relishing our *filets mignons*, along with the

wives and servants who have prepared them for us. I've been there for 20 years now: I've seen it all.

It is not difficult to see why academic film study allowed itself (aside from a few isolated pockets of resistance) to be appropriated, overwhelmingly, by semiotics. In the early days, semiotics promised so much, and with such confidence: it was to be the answer to all critical/theoretical problems, transcending every theory of film that had hitherto been proposed, rendering obsolete all other types of critical discourse. Consequently, it conferred upon film study a convincing academic respectability: unlike previous discourses on aesthetics, it was 'scientific,' its findings were verifiable. And no semiotician, once 'hooked,' seems ever to have suffered from doubts: doubts, especially, as to what was the cost of this new hegemony, doubts about the omissions and suppressions on which it was constructed. Academia had always had problems coping with art (the history of which goes way back to the struggles to include 'Literature' other than 'Classical' — i.e. Greek and Latin — literature in the university curricula). Art is by definition not 'scientific,' and no attempt to encompass it in a 'scientific' discourse, though it may have its provisional uses, can ever be adequate (the basic crime of semiotics was its pretence to adequacy). The function of art, both personal and social, is deeply involved with our emotional life; emotions are not merely 'unscientific,' they are also unacademic. University professors are not supposed to discuss the feelings (elation, despair, disturbance, etc.) that a given work arouses in them: in other words, they are expected to eliminate from their professional discourse all relation to art's real function. Students, correspondingly, are taught to suppress their feelings (that is to say, their active engagement in 'reading' the work adequately) in favour of the elaboration of statements that can somehow be regarded as verifiable, as opposed to the type of provisional agreement/disagreement (Leavis's 'This is so, isn't it?/Yes, but . . .') that characterizes the finer types of critical discourse/collaboration. That these 'verifiable' statements rest upon a structure of theories that are both unproven and unprovable is a point that is conveniently ignored. This is why most papers read out at conferences, and most student essays, are so boring: all the potential life has been deliberately and perversely forced out of them. Film study once had the potential to challenge the whole constricting and oppressive concept of 'the academic,' to be the vanguard of a revolution within that concept; instead, it has sold out to it.

If university students ever feel inclined to start a new revolution (it could hardly develop in isolation, only as part of a general movement in the culture), it could well begin as a revolt against the 'academic': the restrictions on thought and feeling that the university curriculum imposes, in the content of its courses, in the careful regulation of the students' interests and desire in the imposition of essay topics, in the demand for a certain 'correct' style, for constricting rules of essay construction, for the deployment of currently fashionable jargon and the thought-patterns it reproduces. Why should students — the future of civilisation, if indeed, it has one — follow courses? Why shouldn't they lead them? Students would do well to regard university professors as their own employees, and treat them as such: after all, in strict economic terms, it is the students, ultimately, who pay their salaries, either directly (in fees) or indirectly (by agreeing to participate in higher education). It is the students who should design the curriculum calling in the professors in an advisory capacity whenever they feel they might be of use (very seldom, in my estimate of many of my ex-colleagues is accurate and representative).

Any valid revolution must come from below, as a popular movement; a revolution can never be imposed. That is why an 'academic' revolution would have to come from the students. I think many teachers would be ready to join it: it is not only the students who are oppressed by the system. The pressures of conformity are extreme. It is only in my last year that I have taught a course which I can remember with some pride, though my own contribution to it was extremely tentative, and what I am proud of is my ability, at last, to 'let go,' to take a relatively passive role. The course — my own project — was an interdisciplinary Fine Arts course on some of the major currents of 20th century culture, with reference to film, music and literature (the only fields in which I can claim any expertise). Although I produced, at the outset, the requisite list of books to be read and works to be studied, (partly to satisfy the bureaucracy) — we began with Mahler and Tolstoy, and ended with *A Question of Silence, Life Classes*, and the symphonies of Sallinen — I really made up the course as I went along, feeling my way from week to week, asking both myself and the students the fundamental questions: What in the contemporary crisis of our civilisation, perhaps of *any* civilisation, when the future of the planet itself may be in jeopardy — what is important? What should be discussed, in the context of the arts? What *matters*? I gave the students total freedom in what they wrote or produced (a few did largely non-verbal graphic presentations). If they asked me what I wanted, I told them that the only condition was that their work should respond to the question, What does it mean, how does it feel, to be alive in the 20th century? and I quoted Diaghilev's famous demand to Cocteau: 'Astonish me.' They did: I have never before received such an amazing assemblage of original and exciting work. Several of the essays moved me to tears.

Universities should be run by and for the students. At present, they seem to be, predominantly, places where pompous people with Ph.Ds can develop their own sense of self-importance through the wielding of power. The first reform: no lecturer, professor, etc., should have the power of awarding grades for a course. This simple and material function is in fact the whole basis for professors' alleged 'authority' (as opposed to the valid 'authority' of someone who has something urgent to say): it's as basic as that. Deprive a professor of his/her power to award a grade for the course, and the only criterion for that course would be the ability to interest students: to most academics, a terrifying thought. I can see a number of my ex-colleagues having fully justifiable nightmares over it. Yet how humiliating, to feel in your heart that your students fill your classroom, not because they want to hear and discuss what you have to say, but because they hope for a B+. And how shameful to be complicit with that form of blackmail: to stand in front of a class knowing that most of the students present are listening to you, not because they care a damn about what you are saying, but because they are anxious about their degree and feel they must reproduce what you tell them in order to pass your course. Students should be willing to sit and listen to a professor only so long as they sincerely believe that what s/he is saying is important and relevant — relevant not just to the immediate topic or the course content, but to 'life,' and *their* lives; and only so long as he is ready to listen to *them*, without condescension (they may not have so many facts and dates at their fingertips, but they may know a hell of a lot more about 'life,' which is the point). One of the finest compliments I have ever been paid — and simultaneously, one of the most damning indictments of university education in general — occurred at the end of my last course, when a student (a film major) came

up and told me that this was the first course he had taken where the instructor had not made him feel stupid and 'talked him down' when he tried to give his own view of a film. If students would only realize the power they have — without them, a university could not exist — they might cease to tolerate such situations, and such teachers.

There has always been a certain, and necessary, gulf between artist and critic, the artist understanding his work in one way, the critic in another, which the artist may not be able to recognize (in some cases justifiably, in others as a perhaps necessary defence). But in recent years the gulf has become unbridgeable: it seems unlikely that any true artist could see his work in the way proposed by semioticians, which denies the creative function altogether. If s/he did, then why produce it, as it no longer constitutes a creative act or personal statement but must be read (or 'deconstructed') as a kind of automatic 'writing' authored by the culture ('The author does not write, he is written')? What artist wishes to be reduced to the status of scribbling automaton? I certainly believe that artists are not able to understand fully the implications of their own work, and I think in many cases it is important to them that they don't: total selfconsciousness has not shown itself particularly congenial to the production of great art. Creativity (which is all that we are ever likely to know of 'god,' whatever that phenomenon might be) works in very mysterious ways, most of them quite beyond the reach of semiotics. Yet any artist when s/he authorizes publication of a work, thereby accepts a personal responsibility for it. Here I am clearly on the artist's side: a critical theory that has deliberately cut itself off from the recognition of creativity, individual achievement, and personal responsibility, automatically invalidates itself. It may produce important incidental insights, and be valuable for that, but it cannot pretend to interpret the whole of the artistic process or the meaning of the works that process produces.

If the purpose of this article (which, transcending its origins, can be read as a companion piece to the article on Alice Miller that appeared in the last issue) can be summed up in a single, simple formula, I would say that it is to reinstate the appeared in the last issue) can be summed up in a single, word 'creativity' in the available and acceptable critical vocabulary. If we don't believe in our own creativity — which is essentially a *religious* belief, in the widest sense of the word — then I don't understand what we are living for. To lose touch with the concept — I would prefer to say the *reality* — of our creativity is to become detached from the sources of life and the motivation for action. Only the creative forces can save our world: that is why it is necessary to attack the enemies of creativity at every level, wherever they manifest themselves, within the organized religions, within national and international politics, in gender politics, in the educational system, in academia . . .

The notion of creativity solves a number of problems. For a start, it resolves that tedious old opposition, source of much futile wrangling, art/entertainment: Ingmar Bergman is an 'artist,' Howard Hawks an 'entertainer,' but both must be seen as intensely, obsessively 'creative': the difference is simply between the ways in which the creativity is mediated (the area in which semiotics becomes helpful), as all creativity — all human emotional and intellectual activity — must be. I have argued at length, in the introduction to *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (reprinted elsewhere in this issue), for a re-statement of concepts of personal authorship, suitably modified

in the light of experience, and I shall not repeat the argument here. It does, however, seem pertinent to insist again on the harmfulness of the either/or opposition that semiotics has set up: *either* works of art are produced by individual geniuses out of their god-given imaginations, *or* they are cultural/ideological products. Neither term of the opposition is remotely acceptable in itself. Works of art are produced by people whose creativity has crystallized into a specific drive, working within, and partly determined and restricted by, specific cultural formations; they have been formed by the culture, and use its available conventions, but they are not its slaves or puppets. The art that wishes to assert that it is produced outside cultural determination, that wants to be perceived as unmediated personal expression (i.e. certain forms of avant-gardism), has never interested me, though it occasionally produces innovations that can be incorporated into mainstream art. The richest art has always accepted the inevitability of mediation and gladly made creative use of the available conventions, frequently developing them to the point where they are transformed (Shakespeare, Mozart, Mizoguchi . . .).

The widespread contemporary critical/theoretical hostility to mainstream cinema is, by implication, a hostility to the traditional concept and function of art itself and a desire to replace it with a different function. I think this enterprise rests upon misconception and confusion. The new concept cannot possibly *replace* the old, because the function of the 'art' it gave rise to would be completely different: one can't 'replace' a lawn-mower with a hair-dryer. This new concept has two (often distinct, sometimes overlapping) components: the notion that art should have *direct* social/political effect (the 'agitprop' component); the notion that every work of art, to be significant, must be formally innovative, deconstructing the existing conventions. In fact 'innovative' is in this context an inadequate term. Beethoven's 'Eroica' symphony was certainly innovative, but it can easily be demonstrated to have developed out of what preceded it, particularly the late symphonies of Mozart and Haydn: Beethoven simply achieved an unusually long and audacious leap. The concept of innovation current today seems to involve doing something entirely different from anything done before — a virtual impossibility, hence the desperate lengths to which its practitioners have been driven, e.g. John Cage's 'composition' consisting of five minutes of silence; hence also the difficulty of building any steadily evolving avant-garde tradition (a contradiction in terms, since 'tradition' is precisely what such work seeks to destroy).

I am frankly not interested in this second component. The rationale behind most of its products has been the exploration of the material properties of film, and the result has been to demonstrate quite convincingly that the material properties of film are not *in themselves* very interesting and that any art form built strictly upon them is likely to be extremely limited and impoverished. I am not of course hostile to innovation, provided one doesn't make a fetish out of it: anything that offers artists more tools, a wider range of materials, more possibilities of expression, is to be welcomed on principle. An innovation — technical or formal, or simply an extension of admissible subject matter — is valuable in relation to its use. Haydn was 'innovative' at many points in his long career, but many of his symphonies, quartets, etc., capitalize on innovations he had already introduced, and they seem in no way inferior to the works that actually introduced them: often, they are richer. Bach in his day was regarded as a conservative in comparison to composers who are now forgotten outside academia (they have become 'of historical

interest'): he simply made incomparably intelligent and resourceful use of the innovations of others. An 'innovative' work is not necessarily of any particular artistic value: the innovation may be valuable (because of the ways in which it can be used), while the work may not be. It remains true that the important innovators — Haydn, Beethoven, Mahler, Schönberg, for example — have generally been great artists as well, creativity having the tendency of pushing against boundaries, often impatiently; but the great artists are not necessarily important innovators. It can certainly be argued that the greatest single achievement of the so-called 'Second Viennese School' is Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, which draws upon the innovations of Schönberg and uses them, on the whole, in a more conservative way than their great instigator.

I must also take issue here with another contemporary critical perversity (as I see it), the until recently fashionable assault on the 'dominance of narrative' that mainstream cinema has foisted upon us so oppressively. The 'dominance of narrative' has reprehensively impeded the full flowering of the potential of film as a medium, that potential consisting, apparently, of a set of formal/technical devices the development of which should be an end in itself, outside the dominance of anything else. (This is essentially the view, as I understand it, of Noel Burch in his formalist period and of the 'Wisconsin neo-formalist school' in its remoter reaches of speculation. It should be added, in fairness, that neither seems now to stand by his/its earlier theoretical excesses, to judge from the 'revisionist' introduction to the later edition of Burch's *Theory of Film Practice*, or David Bordwell's recent book on Ozu). It will be seen that this view merges easily with the view of innovation discussed above.

I think myself that narrativity, though not the only potential of cinema, was and remains the most important and the one still capable of the richest and most complex developments. It is certainly a potential inherent in the medium itself, and not dismissible as an imposition on it of bourgeois ideology. Narrative is already inherent, potentially, in photography, and in representational painting: a picture of a tree tells us, to adapt Christian Metz, not merely 'Tree,' but 'Here is a tree.' The beginning of a narrative? rather, perhaps, the middle of a narrative. The tree has a history: a past, when it was a seed, and a future, when it will be timber, or fertiliser for subsequent trees. It also has a more circumscribed history, imaged at a specific time of day or night. As soon as you move into film, the potential narrative becomes actualized: a shot of a leaf stirred by a breeze is already a story. One might, of course, postulate a narrative cinema that eliminated or marginalized human beings, (a cinema that Ozu and Mizoguchi, despite the posthumous theorizing of the formalists, happily never succeeded in realizing). Such a cinema might be a beneficial reminder of 'Otherness,' but it could never play a central role in western culture (for better or worse). It doesn't appear, so far, to have been developed in any culture, and certainly not in Japan. (There is a lot more to say on that subject: I propose to devote an article to Ozu in a later issue of *CineAction!*, wherein I shall endeavour to rescue his work from the clutches of neo-formalism). The West must, I am afraid, pursue its own destiny, for better or for worse. We certainly have it in our power to affect that destiny, but not by deflecting attention from human interaction (also known as 'narrative').

It has been customary, since the early days of the semiological takeover, to denounce me as a 'humanist,' and the foregoing paragraphs will once again confirm this view. If humanism is defined as 'Having a primary interest in human life, human potential, human creativity, human relations — per-

sonal, social, political,' then I plead guilty and remain repentant. This interest also seems to me to provide the subject-matter of significant narrative art — again by definition.

If I am sceptical about the value often attributed to the 'formalist innovation' side of avant-gardism, on the other hand I fully acknowledge the value of 'agitprop': the attempts of artists to make a direct intervention within a specific set of social/political circumstances, in order to effect or at least influence immediate change. The function of agitprop is, however, quite distinct from the function of the art with which, as a critic, I am primarily concerned (though both may, in specific circumstances, be produced by the same artist). The difference can be seen clearly if one considers the criteria for evaluation that are relevant to the two categories. The criteria by which one judges a piece of agitprop are: 1. Is it on 'my' side? and 2. Is it likely to be politically effective in influencing people here and now and promoting a specific definable end? Certainly, there are sets of political circumstances of such urgency (one could instance many in the world today, and might well argue that they have become all pervasive) in which the production of agitprop becomes top priority and the production of art almost frivolous. (For an intelligent defence of art in a period of social crisis, see Hindemith's opera *Mathis der Maler*). When a piece of agitprop has fulfilled (or failed to fulfil) its function, it becomes of merely historical or merely aesthetic interest.

The criteria by which one judges works of art are quite other, and resist any simple definition of this kind: the aim of art is not susceptible to pat summary (which is its strength, not its weakness). The criteria would include terms (none of which must be taken as absolute or prescriptive) such as complexity, intelligence, sensitivity, emotional generosity, relevance to 'life,' as well as (and in close and necessary conjunction with) the aesthetic criteria of form, structure, style. The significant fusion of these two sets of criteria is what Leavis sums up in his indispensable terms 'enactment' and 'realization.'

It will be objected (quite rightly) that the above is still too simple, that the opposition art/agitprop is often not so clear-cut. (I leave aside here the question of 'propaganda': I assume that the distinction between propaganda and agitprop is that the former is produced by those in power and the latter by those who wish to overthrow it. My argument therefore has no room for propaganda). *Middlemarch* is a work of art, the graffiti 'NO TO HOMOPHOBIA' which is still, at time of writing, on prominent display at York University is a piece of agitprop. But what of, for example, Marleen Gorris's admirable *A Question of Silence*: art or agitprop? Clearly, it contains elements of both. What I am trying to define, however, is a difference in function, and there is no reason why two distinct functions should not in certain circumstances be combined, become fused. In general, it is not the function of art to effect direct and specific social change: if it does, it does so incidentally. Works of art (not necessarily good ones) that have had direct, discernible, statistically demonstrable social effect are very rare indeed: it was reported that many people joined the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament after seeing *On the Beach* (how long the impetus lasted is less easily verifiable); and *Oliver Twist* reputedly influenced changes in the Poor Laws in Victorian England (as the most disgraceful poverty — disgraceful from the viewpoint of the culture that permits it — is still very much with us and around us, the changes, though obviously valuable for their time and place, cannot be held to have been very radical). There does not seem to me to be any contradiction in applauding these

works for the effect they produced while insisting that *On the Beach* is by no stretch of the imagination a great film and that *Oliver Twist* is very far from being among Dickens's greatest novels. This does not mean that art has no social effect: simply that it is impossible to measure it. *Dombey and Son*, which formally 'enacts' and 'realizes' its themes in ways of which the Dickens of *Oliver Twist* was incapable, remains today one of the greatest feminist novels in the whole of literature, because its analysis goes much deeper than anything likely (even today) to be ratified by law.

Agitprop is for a fixed and definable purpose; art is not. That is its weakness (if you like), but it is also the definition of its importance, and why, even in an age as desperate as ours, it continues to merit our attention and commitment. It is not easy to defend art from any practical, immediate, political viewpoint, and one can certainly understand the impatience with it of people who want to see everything change and change quickly (I hope it will be clear that I strongly sympathize with them). Art can be appropriated for all sorts of purposes (and by all classes or groups of people), many of them reprehensible in the extreme. We are all familiar, for example, with the use of opera as a social event for the wealthy to display their clothes, wives, their wives' jewels, and of course their 'culture'; but does anyone who grasps the significance of Verdi's operas wish to relegate them to that function? Then there is the oft-quoted case (it doesn't matter whether it is fact or myth, as it is perfectly plausible) of the concentration camp commandant who used to relax after the onerous duties of the day by playing Schubert on the piano. The answer to that one seems to me as simple: to use Schubert merely as an escape is to demonstrate one's total inability to understand him. The disturbing fact remains: art always offers that licence. You can choose to ignore its meaning and imbibe it as 'culture'; you can read *Dombey and Son* 'just for the story,' and take nothing else away from it. This is not because the artist 'compromises,' 'sugars the pill,' etc. It is rather because great art does not deliver messages or tell people exactly what they should do, but attempts to represent, explore and criticize human experience as fully and honestly as possible, and the more complete and adequate the representation, the easier to ignore or minimize the criticism, since experience is always many-sided and ambiguous.

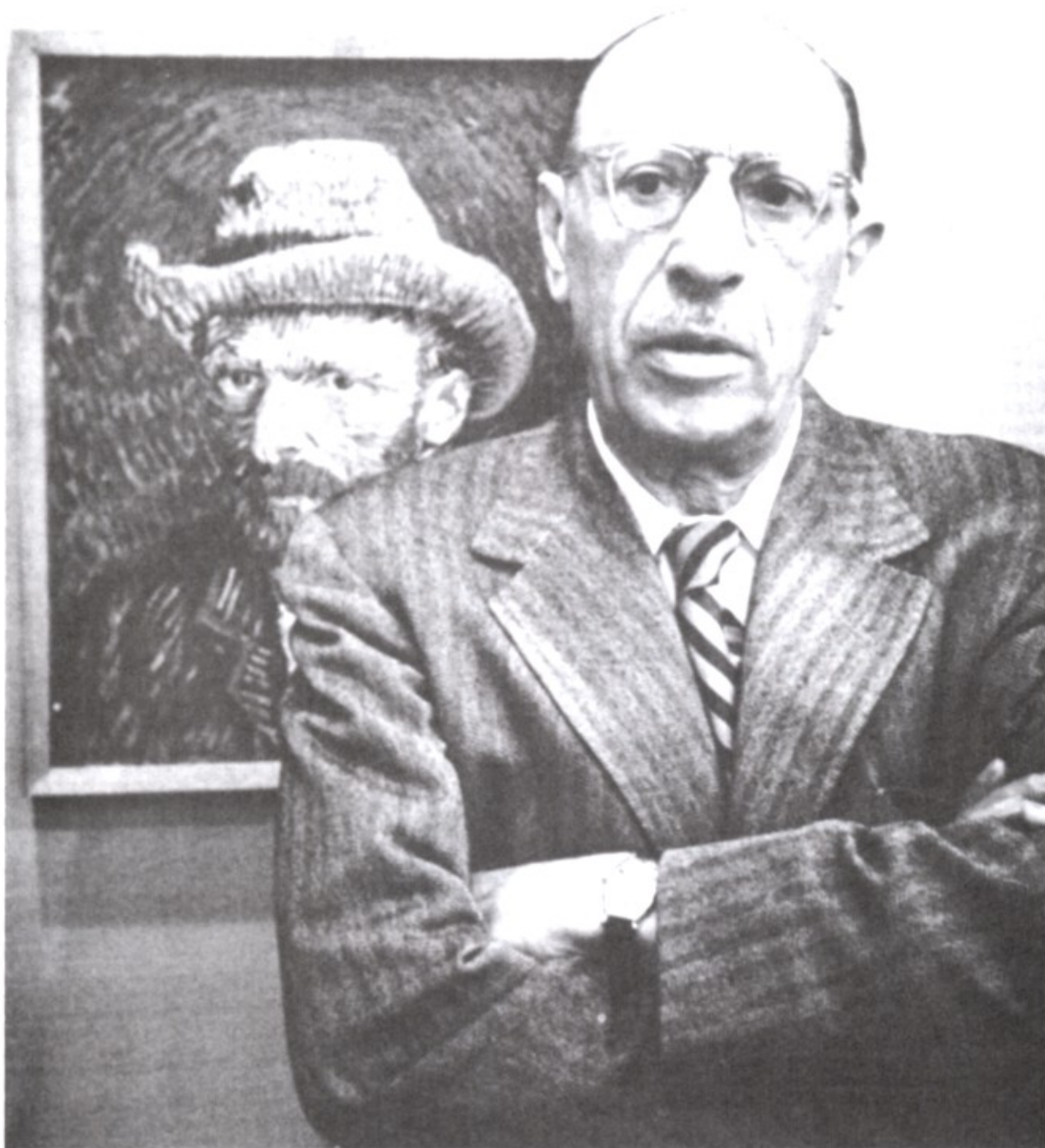
The answer to these perplexities seems to me not the rejection of art but its redemption, which is synonymous with its appropriation for radical purposes. Such an appropriation is perfectly valid and intellectually justifiable as it is based (unlike the social displays of operagoers or the relaxation of concentration camp commandants) upon a recognition of art's true nature. A great work of art is by definition (whatever its more superficial meanings, which could be extremely conservative) an embodiment of human creativity; and it is human creativity (the phenomenon that all the dominant forces of our epoch, on every level, are bent upon repressing, destroying or denying) that is the basis, validation and impetus of all resistance to oppression, all protest, all justified revolution.

Creativity has perhaps never been understood, acknowledged, and valued at its worth within capitalist culture: as the supreme value of human life, no less. A culture founded upon greed, competition and money-values must at bottom be terrified of it, whatever lip-service it pays to 'art,' 'individualism,' 'expression,' etc.: a liberated creativity could only be deeply threatening. At some deep level our culture acknowledges the threat, and responds to it: we live in an age when creativity is being systematically destroyed or perverted at every level, both by the capitalists and by the intellectuals

who profess to be their enemies. Only a few voices, today, speak for life, and they are in constant danger of being drowned out. Who can realize his/her creativity, and what forms can creativity assume as its flesh, in a world in which it is confronted on all sides by moral and aesthetic ugliness and squalor, and where these — the values of consumer-capitalism — are raised up as the values by which people are supposed to live? You have only to ride, with open eyes, on a subway train in any of our cities, and examine the advertisements that surround you, to recognize the simple truth of this assertion. It becomes difficult to understand how anyone, leafing through the pages of his/her daily newspaper, does not draw the obvious conclusions and become committed to the necessity for revolution: it is unlikely that any page will not contain evidence of some horror *directly attributable to be conditions and structures of our culture*, whether it be national or international, general or personal, from yet another instance of child abuse through an exposure of yet another political scandal to the report of yet another environmental hazard produced and condoned by 'businessmen' who love their children and grandchildren so very much but basically don't care whether they grow up in a world in which it is possible even to survive, provided profits continue to accumulate.

I want to develop the argument for the radical appropriation of art, and I shall argue it at its most difficult, taking as my example not the cinema (the political dimensions of which — from melodrama to screwball comedy, from musical to *film noir*, from western to horror film — should by now be obvious enough), but the apparently abstract, non-narrative, art of classical music, where one cannot point to such obviously 'political' features as the presentation of character-relationships, etc. And I shall make things even more difficult for myself by concentrating on the most seemingly abstract of all great composers, the man who, at one stage of a long and varied career, actually declared that music, by its very nature, is incapable of expressing anything. I am thinking less here of Stravinsky's early ballets (the so-called 'Russian period,' where the major influence was Debussy) than of the extraordinary succession of assured, mature masterpieces produced from the '20s on — roughly from the *Wind Octet* to *Agon*.

Stravinsky is an especially useful figure to evoke in the context of semiotics, because no composer has had a stronger sense of music as a sign-system, or series of sign-systems. In his mature works he deliberately employs the conventions, the idioms, of virtually every period of western music, from the Middle Ages to Schonberg, from Bach to jazz. The result is neither parody nor pastiche, though it has been mistaken for both: although wit and humour play important roles in the music, we are never invited to laugh at or feel superior to the conventions it employs; although the past is always present in the music — by reference at least — there is never a sense that the past is being reconstructed. Every work is astonishingly *new*, even when it quotes (see, for instance, what Stravinsky does with the theme of the *Barber of Seville* Overture, in the 'third deal' of *Jeu de Cartes*) — innovative in the best sense, rooted in tradition but pressing forward to new discoveries. Hence, Stravinsky's insistence that he was not a 'composer of music' but an 'inventor of music.' Every work — even the relatively slight ones — asks to be heard as (whatever else besides) an embodiment and celebration of creative energy, of the joy of liberated creativity, a creativity fuelled by the rediscovery of the past. The creativity manif-



December 1953. Stravinsky with a portrait of Vincent Van Gogh

ests itself, above all, in the music's extraordinary fusion of the physical and the spiritual (perhaps its strongest, most constant characterizing feature). No music is more intensely physical. If chance initially involved Stravinsky in the ballet, it was not chance that took him back to it repeatedly, through all the transformations of his career. Every Stravinsky work — not only the ballets or those that build explicitly on dance forms — consistently evokes bodily movement (it is very difficult to keep still while listening to the *Dumbarton Oaks* Concerto!). At the same time, the music is perhaps

unique, in our *angst*-ridden century, in its *convincing* embodiment of spiritual qualities, such as serenity, joy, exaltation. This is, perhaps why Stravinsky was regarded so often with distrust, as some kind of charlatan: his music is so at odds with the spirit of the age that one can easily feel that it has no right to exist. Yet the spirituality is never spurious, willed or facile: prolonged acquaintance with the music makes it impossible to doubt its authenticity. It is not, of course, at all the kind of 'spirituality' to which common usage has accustomed us: it is a spirituality expressed through emotional

toughness, wit and energy, the capacity to sustain an apparently unquenchable sense of joy from one's inner resources, in the face of the most daunting odds.

Let me specify one moment out of the hundreds one might choose as emblematic: the magical moment in the first *pas d'action* of *Apollo* where the theme (or more precisely a segment of it) — in itself a melody of unsurpassable beauty — is played in counterpoint at four different speeds simultaneously by the different sections of the string orchestra. The technical *tour de force* is important, and it is important that the listener be aware of it: the sense of extraordinary human skills fulfilling their potential is a significant factor in the effect. Closely related to this is the moment's formal satisfaction — the sense that certain potentials of the material are being fully realized. There is the seeming paradox that this high point of form and technique is emotionally a point of relative relaxation, ease, serenity. There is also the sense of a satisfying order and control: a benevolent control, a non-repressive order. It is one of the transcendental moments of modern western music (though there are at least half-a-dozen others in the same score!) — a *utopian* moment, an emblem of utopia.

Stravinsky's mature music makes nonsense of any simplistic opposition between personal expression and cultural production. In fact, the opposition seems to depend for its plausibility on the construction of a parody, an absurdly naive notion of 'personal expression': Mozart was feeling a bit gloomy one day so he composed his G minor symphony; a few days later he cheered up and composed the 'Jupiter.' Every great artist carries within him/her the capacity for recalling and drawing creatively upon the widest range of human emotional experience, and knows how to use the culturally available signs, idioms, conventions as a medium for its expression. Bergman's statement that he couldn't have made *The Silence* if he hadn't been, at that time, a happy man is pertinent here.

Against the utopian experience of Stravinsky's music that I have tried to describe, I want to set another experience: that of wandering the streets of San Francisco at night and seeing the homeless huddled in doorways and alcoves under blankets, rags and newspapers. Does the latter experience invalidate the former, render it frivolous, escapist and morally reprehensible? I don't think so. The crucial question is the use we put it to, for what end we appropriate it. Does one separate the two experiences, or juxtapose them? It is very easy to see how Stravinsky's music, which in general has no explicit or obvious political connotations, could be used as an escape, a refuge: with its apparent denial of engagement with the social realities it lends itself to that. It depends, in the last resort, on whether one experiences it as an escape or a utopia. If the latter, then it provides a touchstone and context within which the monstrous and unpardonable enormities of our culture can be seen for what they are: instead of a refuge, it becomes a further spur to action. The realized sense of human potential, of human creativity, a unified physical/spiritual transcendence, when juxtaposed with the reality of actual and remediable human misery, becomes a virtual plea for revolution, for the overthrow of the domination of the greedy, the selfish, the materialistic, the seekers after wealth and power, the petty-minded, the essentially ignorant . . . the people who at present determine the development of our culture and its future, if it has one.

Or take Mahler. The 3rd symphony is perhaps the most comprehensive celebration of nature and humanity's relation to it in all music: coarse, refined, brutal, tender, raucous, gentle, banal, sublime. To listen to it within the context of the

blind and brutish devastation of the environment by capitalism and Stalinist communism alike — the pincer forces of the universal death-wish — has certainly become a political experience, beyond anything Mahler could have envisaged. And to listen *seriously* to Janacek's Glagolitic Mass, one must either be or become a revolutionary.

The construction of emblems of utopia — embodiments of human potential and human creativity at its highest — is one of the most important possible functions of art; it is by no means the only one. There is the strictly complementary function (each acquires its validity in part from the coexistence of the other), the examination and analysis of human existence as the artist understands it: not the unmediated depiction of some personal vision of some universal 'reality,' 'human nature,' 'the human condition,' but the reality of social structures, social relations, the values and norms of the culture — the kind of critical inquiry found in classical Hollywood film at its finest. There is also art of protest, related to agitprop but more personal, less public, in its nature and ambitions, art that may seem (lifted out of its social context) to amount to no more than an impotent protest against life itself, but which (restored to its social context) reveals itself as protest against the most impossible and crippling social conditions. Against the utopian art of Stravinsky one might set the distinctly non-utopian art of Shostakovich, music characterized by despair, rage and sarcasm. One can readily see it as the other side of the coin: the protest is against, ultimately, the denial of the utopian potential, and its very intensity testifies to the terrible deprivation that results from that denial: the human need for the availability of the utopian vision is made the more poignant and authentic by its absence.

Consider the astonishing creative energy that produced, say, the 8th symphony. One can relate it, certainly, to influences (the past of Russian music, Mahler, and, yes, Stravinsky at times; and isn't that Nielsen behind long stretches



September 16, 1961. Stockholm. Stravinsky with Ingmar Bergman

of the last movement, beginning from the bridge passage that leads into it from the Largo? — one would love to know whether Shostakovich was actually aware of the Great Dane) and to social circumstances (the suffering of the 2nd World War, rage against the rise of Stalinism). Does this mean that the symphony is yet another arrangement of signifiers? — that it doesn't correspond to anything that Shostakovich, as a human being in a given cultural/historical situation, thought and felt and *meant*? — that the composer did not compose, he was composed? The very idea is stupid, petty-minded and insulting: it could be advanced only by an impermanent and undistinguished mind bent on a malignant destructiveness toward everything that is of value in human life and toward all the significant achievements of human civilisation.

The semiotics movement began (in England at least) as a revolutionary movement committed to the analysis and exposure of the manifold forms of oppression; it has ended by declaring all human endeavour meaningless. One question urgently needs to be asked and answered: why has a whole generation of intellectuals, apparently dedicated to transforming the culture radically by undermining its dominant norms, been so perversely preoccupied in expressing its discoveries (of which the basic and most important ones are not particularly obscure) in language impenetrable to all but the initiated? What can possibly be the *political* justification for such a strategy? Surely this weird phenomenon can be explained only in terms of a paralysing ambivalence: the sense of the need for a total transformation of the social structure from its base upward, involving not merely changes on the level of politics and economics but in personal relationships, gender roles, taken-for-granted social institutions such as marriage and the family, all our social and sexual arrangements in all their comforting familiarity, is countered, rendered impotent, by a fear lest such a change actually come about, lest words (of which we have had so many) be converted into action. So let's keep the news safe, the possession of the intellectuals, wrapped up in esoteric language that only a small élite will understand. Finally, the movement has produced its necessary and ideal solution: the necessary change is proven to be impossible. Eureka!

To move forward from the impasse one must first move back; if, searching for a route to a new and vital future, one has taken a wrong turning and finds oneself up a dead end, one must first retrace one's steps to the point where one went wrong. I believe that point to be the moment when the intellectuals jettisoned the notion of human creativity. To correct one possible misunderstanding of what I have written so far, let me say here that I intend the term in its widest sense. Doubtless the highest manifestation of creativity, its most concrete, tangible and irrefutable embodiment, is in the great achievements of art, but these are but the highest expression of something far more general, constitutive of human-ness itself. What I have in mind is the sense in which we commonly speak of 'creative emotions' or 'creative relationships,' and the force of this will be immediately clear if we remind ourselves that the opposite of 'creative' is 'destructive.'

I take it as axiomatic that *all* authentic manifestations of creativity are of value, though the degree will vary enormously from instance to instance. Because it goes necessarily — by definition, one might say — with a high degree of sensitivity, creativity is extremely vulnerable, easily damaged, warped, perverted, disguising itself for protection in coldness,

negativity and denial. This is how I see the work of Lynch and Cronenberg: that their films are currently held in such high esteem testifies to the frightening strength and pervasiveness, in our era, of the forces of negativity. Here the artists' creativity — while its authenticity is not in question — has been cruelly stunted, the life-affirmation which is central to the creative impulse perverted into attitudes of cynicism and disgust, attacking the roots of life itself. This is what is meant by defining the interest of such works as *Blue Velvet* and *Dead Ringers* as that of the 'case': they are certainly not devoid of either interest or distinction, and there are ways in which they can be found useful, as testimonies to the harm our culture can (and pervasively *does*) do to the potential of the human psyche.

If what one values in art is the manifestation of human creativity (the embodied movement of thought and feeling, intelligence and sensitivity), then the importance of evaluation as the ultimate aim of criticism — the careful arguing of value-judgements that are at once responsible and provisional — automatically follows. Semiotics has a perfectly valid and useful, but strictly subsidiary and humble, function to perform (its problem being that it has developed unwarranted and finally destructive delusions of grandeur): the analysis of the conventions and structures of non-creative artifacts (the *merely* conventional, *merely* commercial, inert and mechanical) in order to establish the background against which truly creative art can be seen for what it is. A semiological analysis of a Roy Rogers western, a television sitcom, a shampoo commercial, can be (if its point is not blunted by Emperor's New Clothing of pretentious and mystificatory jargon) extremely useful. On the other hand, a semiological analysis, *if it pretends to adequacy*, of a *Heaven's Gate*, a *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, or even (descending somewhat in the scale of achievement) a *Touch of Evil*, is merely presumptuous. 'If it pretends to adequacy': I grant, by that qualifying clause, that semiotics can be useful in analysing *any* work of art, as a means of establishing a work's deviation from or transcendence of the norms, rather than (as has usually been the case) reducing it *to* them: a means of establishing the degree of a work's generality and conformity, in order to highlight and foreground the important thing, the degree and nature of its specificity and distinction, which will *always* be traceable to the creativity of an author or authors. The valid task of semiotics, in order words, is to serve the critical function by clearing away the deadwood, facilitating the examination of vital growth. From this viewpoint, the entire purpose and *raison d'être* of Stephen Heath's celebrated reading of *Touch of Evil* (which remains, for all its perversity, among the most distinguished achievements of the semiotics movement in the area of film) should have been the demonstration of the extent to which Welles' creativity (with all its flaws) triumphs over and transforms the inert conventions that continue partly to structure the narrative.

Leavis always insisted upon the inseparability, in any value-judgement, of aesthetics and morality; I would turn this duo into a triumvirate by adding politics: a valid value-judgement must be at once moral, aesthetic and political. I am sometimes confronted by the perplexing — I would say intrinsically nonsensical — objection that an interest in questions of morality is in some mysterious way incompatible with, even antagonistic to, an interest in politics. I can only ask, in response, if a political judgement, is not a moral judgement, then what is it? — what can it possibly mean and what can be its basis? The choice between socialism and capitalism, or between feminism and non-feminism (by which term I mean an indifference to feminism; *anti-*

feminism, which can rest only on bigotry and blind stupidity, does not merit serious consideration, despite its current hideous re-emergence), is a *moral* choice: a choice, in my view, between morality and immorality.

Before passing to specific examples of the kinds of critical value judgement that seem to me worth attempting, I shall sum up the first part of this article by reiterating certain key points. They seem to me obvious, but the obvious continues to be conveniently ignored by those who find it inconvenient.

1. The reason for the rejection of the concept (or reality) of creativity (one of the most *necessary* terms in the critical vocabulary) is doubtless partly that it inevitably brings in its wake other concepts (personal authorship, spiritual values, 'religious' experience) that are anathema to our self-professed 'scientific' Marxists (to the disastrous impoverishment of Marxism): like creativity, they have to be rejected as mere bourgeois illusions, despite the fact that they have, in their infinite manifestations, animated every known culture since that of the cave-dwellers, and continue to animate our own (in so far as it is still capable of being animated — one should not mistake its convulsive mechanistic jerkings for creative energy), despite concerted efforts to repress or deny them.

2. Creativity, though it must be taken as one of the defining characteristics of humanity, central to any concept of 'life,' if 'life' means more than mere inert or mechanical existence, can only express itself — embody itself — in ideological forms. This is presumably why semioticians manage to reduce it to some kind of ideological manifestation or function: creativity becomes 'an effect of the text,' not the force that animates it.

3. Creativity is fostered or stifled by specific cultural conditions. Given the realities of our contemporary civilisation, it is amazing — and a tribute to its tenacity, its 'inextinguishability,' to borrow a title from the great Carl Nielsen — that it survives at all, especially as so many of those who should be passionately defending, preserving and nurturing it (the true function of criticism) seem perversely bent on denying its reality.

4. The kind of use the creative artist makes of the available forms — her/his attitude to those forms — will depend very much upon the whole complex of existing cultural conditions. It has been possible, in certain phases of our civilisation (frequently those that have been richest in the production of art) for artists to feel comfortable within the available forms and able to develop and enlarge them from within: Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Shakespeare were all of this type, and so were certain of the great directors of the classical Hollywood period (Hawks and Ford, for example). At other times the nature of the artist's creativity and her/his situation within the culture will make it impossible to work comfortably within the available forms; the moulds will quickly shatter from the strain, and new forms will rapidly evolve: Blake and Berlioz are obvious examples. Stravinsky, an extreme case, swiftly discovered that the tradition into which he was born was really of no use to him whatever: even *Fireworks* owes more to Debussy than to Rimsky-Korsakov, and each of the three early ballets, though still in some ways conspicuously 'Russian,' constitutes a leap away from his immediate musical inheritance. He eventually felt compelled to construct his own tradition, out of his progressive discoveries of the European past.

I want to safeguard myself against one other possible misconception: the notion that the critical practice I am upholding here has as its function the validation/celebration of 'supreme works,' 'immortal masterpieces,' the establishment of a 'Pantheon' with (as its corollary) the summary dismissal of everything that falls short. I think one needs touchstones (they are likely to vary widely from person to person): works that embody what one feels to be most valuable. Otherwise, one can get carried away by the pleasures of the moment. I watched *Turner and Hooch* the other night, and found it a decent, amusing little movie: at least, it wasn't hateful, in the manner of most contemporary Hollywood movies. If I had seen nothing *except* contemporary Hollywood movies, and read nothing except Mickey Spillane, and heard no music beyond Billy Joel, I think I might have formed the opinion that it represents one of the peaks of artistic achievement. Placed in a context that includes *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, not Clarence Brown), the *B minor Mass*, and *Tokyo Story*, it appears negligible (which is not to say that I am ungrateful for a pleasant 100 minutes). On the other hand, I can see some point in devoting ten minutes to arguing for the superiority of *Turner and Hooch* to *K-9* (though I do not propose to do so here). My point is simply that discriminations are worth making at all levels of artistic aspiration. I think my own record is sufficiently clear on this: when I have argued in the past for the interest and distinction of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and *Eyes of a Stranger* in relation to the general run of teen sex comedies and slasher movies, I don't think I can have been taken as offering Amy Heckerling and Ken Wiederhorn as the contemporary Hollywood cinema's equivalents of Rembrandt and Leonardo. But the objection continues monotonously to recur, the simplest way of attacking a position of whose validity you don't wish to be convinced, remaining the strategy of constructing a parody of it and attacking *that*.

Consider, then, a comparison that occurred to me recently during a performance by Marianne Faithfull in a San Francisco club: W.H. Auden's 'ballad' *Miss Gee*; the Beatles' song *Eleanor Rigby*; and *The Ballad of Lucy Jordan* by Shel Silverstein, made famous by Faithfull in her album *Broken English*, the rendition subsequently taken up by Makavejev for the soundtrack of *Montenegro* (Faithfull repeats it in her new album *Blazing Away*, with immensely clearer diction — one can at last get all the words!). It might look at first sight like a simplistic and trifling exercise: the work of one of the 20th century's most 'brilliant' intellectual poets placed beside a couple of (presumably) ephemeral pop songs. In fact, it is *Miss Gee* and *Eleanor Rigby* that seem to me to belong most significantly together (though there, too, there are discriminations to be made), with *Lucy Jordan* definitively 'placing' them both. I am also not troubled by the fact that we are comparing works in different media (a poem, two songs): clearly, one cannot separate *Eleanor Rigby* and *Lucy Jordan* from the familiarity of their respective performances (so that authorship becomes problematic), but my concern here is with overall effect, and with the nature of the intelligence and sensibility in evidence. Obviously, the nature of the audience implicitly being addressed is of prime importance.

Miss Gee and *Eleanor Rigby* are linked, for all the disparity in authorial ambition and the audience addressed, by the fact that they are both by men, about women, and by their condescension toward their subjects — far more obnoxious in Auden than in the Beatles. Auden's poem, indeed, is the kind of object one wishes to hold at arm's length, one's fingers on one's nose. Even its form and manner seem condescending: the great intellectual poet goes slumming, generously reach-

ing down to the level of those who are (understandably) baffled by the determinedly crabbed and convoluted obscurities of his 'serious' work. Auden's intellectuality (a characteristic never to be confused with intelligence) has in general as its main object the establishment of his superiority to his readers (the intellectualizing proving, on inspection, to be in most cases devoid of significant substance, a mere exercising of cerebral tissue). In *Miss Gee* Auden's need to establish superiority is extended to his subject, a function for which Miss Gee is the ideal construct: to what, more than to an 'old maid,' could a male (even, somewhat shamefully, a gay one) feel more grandly superior? Miss Gee suffers from the Freudian cliché of producing a cancer instead of a baby (she is a victim of sexual repression, the only reason why a woman might wish to remain unmarried), and ends up, coldly dissected, as a medical specimen. On the level of conscious intention Auden apparently wants to convey his outrage at such callousness; yet the callousness is shared, unambiguously, by the poem, which dissects Miss Gee just as coldly, revelling in its own smartness. Consider, in relation to any possible expression of compassion, the tone, diction and movement of this representative quatrain:

They laid her on the table,
The students began to laugh;
And Mr. Rose the surgeon
He cut Miss Gee in half.

One could, I think, argue seriously (without making any extravagant claims) that the Beatles in their brief heyday, and within their cultural context, represented a more interesting *kind* of creativity than is embodied in the works of Auden. Many of their songs (including *Eleanor Rigby*) significantly extended the range of expression and subject-matter of which 'pop' music was capable. *Eleanor Rigby* remains, for me, somewhat distasteful — perhaps because 'expression' and 'subject matter' haven't quite jelled and the chirpy, jaunty tune is at odds with any socially aware compassion one might find in the lyrics. Compassion, in fact, is again what the song lacks, and the effect is once again of condescension, and the establishment of a superiority bordering on (perhaps passing over into) contempt: 'All the lonely people' are not being offered for our understanding (the question, 'Where *do* they all come from?' receives no answer, and there is no sense that the song's audience expects one) but for 'us' (that is, the youth community) to feel reassured that we are not like them, we are not lonely, we can all come together and cheer at Beatles' concerts. And of course we can also have sex, unlike poor Eleanor. At least she is spared the grosser indignities of cancer and public dissection, but there remains the sense that, as 'old maid,' the loneliness is her just desert.

The essential difference lies in social context and in the audience being addressed: the *cultural* meaning of *Eleanor Rigby* is significantly different from that of *Miss Gee*. It is not entirely clear to me just how the Beatles' audience, by the time of *Revolver* (the album that introduced *Eleanor Rigby*), is to be defined: certainly it had become much more amorphous than the audience for their early songs. The songs up to *A Hard Day's Night* (and of course including that album's title-song) seem addressed primarily to a *working-class* youth audience. Fame changes all that. And of course movie stardom: one can see the change enacted in the transition from *A Hard Day's Night* (the movie) to the very different *Help!*, where the Beatles lose their class connotations and become generalized emblems of 'liberation' (the film was compared by some critics to those of the Marx Brothers). By the time of *Revolver* the audience has become 'youth' in gen-

eral; and the middle- and upper-classes can afford to buy more records. The album seems to mark the phase of transition, a midpoint in the shift in subject-matter from the fatigue and sexual energy of working-class men (*A Hard Day's Night*) to psychedelic experience (*Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*, in the *Sergeant Pepper* album). By the time of *Revolver*, also, the Establishment had begun to decree that the Beatles were 'important': they could enlist the aid of Alan Civil, the leading horn-player of the Philharmonia Orchestra who had recently recorded all the Mozart horn concertos with Otto Klemperer (see *For No One*), and it would not be long before music critics were comparing them (not to their disadvantage) to Schubert. I remember that it was around this time that my wife and I (an archetypal bourgeois couple) began to collect Beatles albums, having crinkled up our noses in disgust at their earlier efforts....

The working class tradition from which the Beatles came, and the generalized youth audience they ended up addressing, scarcely offer more progressive attitudes to the unmarried woman (aka 'old maid') than the audience for poems by fashionable intellectuals prior to the emergence of militant feminism. What makes *Eleanor Rigby* so much more acceptable than *Miss Gee* is, nonetheless, its social context. The question is of who is being invited to feel superior and why. At the heart (though it doesn't have one) of Auden's poem is the ridicule of a woman who failed to fulfil her 'true' biological function, produced with smug calculation for an intellectual élite (we needn't be *too* impressed by Auden's new-found 'simplicity' — the desire to reach a wider audience never amounted to more than the vaguest gesture) assumed to share the attitude. (It is important that Miss Gee is not only an 'old maid': she inhabits that spectral netherworld that is neither working-class — we mustn't ridicule 'the workers' — nor successfully bourgeois). The Beatles' song, on the other hand, is addressed primarily to a disaffected younger generation ready (up to a certain point) to reject the values of conservative bourgeois 'respectability,' though without any clear idea of what might replace them; its animus is directed as much against organized religion (as depicted in the figure of Father Mackenzie and his 'sermons that no one will hear') as against old-maidness. Its appeal, that is, is to a *potential* anti-establishment solidarity (we are in the age of the 'hippie' movement), even at the moment when the Beatles themselves were becoming an Establishment institution. That seems far less reprehensible than the knowing flattery of an élite.

The first thing to be said of *The Ballad of Lucy Jordan* is that it is the only one of the three examples (having the advantage of a later date) to view its subject from a feminist perspective: which is to say, showing an awareness of the realities of its female protagonist's social position. The second (closely related) is that it alone does not have as its creative motivation the desire to establish superiority to its subject. It is also the only one that is the work of women. (I know nothing about Shel Silverstein, but am assuming she is a woman — Shelley? It would be nice if she turned out to be a man, because it seems so important, from every point of view, that men should become feminists; that one feels, from the internal evidence of the song, that this is very unlikely to be the case testifies to the distance most men still have to travel before they can achieve real empathy with a woman's viewpoint.)

The question of audience, and the song's relation to its audience, is again crucial. Faithfull's audience cannot be assumed to have been composed exclusively of militant feminists. Her fame initially rested upon her ignominious status as Mick Jagger's lover, and subsequently on her struggles to

overcome her drug problems and on her growing self-awareness (and, with it, social awareness). The great respect that I think her work commands is due partly to the fact that she never exploits this directly personal background in any self-serving way: if certain of her songs refer to it, the tone is never either self-pitying or self-congratulatory. She assumes that her listeners 'know' all about her, but she consistently maintains a distance both from them and from herself, an impersonality even when she is most 'personal.' One might say that her performances evoke Dietrich rather than Garland. This gains a special significance from the fact that the audience at the performance I recently attended, while it included many women, was predominantly male. Of the three works I am considering, *The Ballad of Lucy Jordan* is the only one that *challenges* (as opposed to indulging) its audience.

It is impossible to separate the song from Marianne Faithfull's inimitable rendering of it (I have never heard it sung by anyone else): she has made it hers as much as its composer's, the extraordinary fusion of anger and compassion belonging as much to the performance as to the text and melody. At the same time, it is obviously important that here text and melody are fully integrated: there is nothing of that sense of jarring dislocation between music and subject that one experiences when listening to *Eleanor Rigby*. But the song belongs to Faithfull rather than *Now, Voyager* belongs to Bette Davis. Behind it (as performed) lies an authentic pain and struggle, for selfhood, but also for survival itself. Lucy Jordan, the bourgeois housewife and mother, whose 'case' is so remote from Faithfull's own, and who never achieves selfhood, withdrawing instead into attempted suicide and insanity, is neither condescended to nor sentimentalized; the rendering establishes, simultaneously, imaginative empathy and detachment. Unlike Miss Gee and Eleanor Rigby, Lucy is presented as trapped within a clearly defined context of male control, from the 'nursery rhymes she memorized at her Daddy's easy-chair,' through her preordained role as housewife with its real and fantastic options ('She could clean the house for hours/Or rearrange the flowers/Or run naked through the shady streets, screaming all the way'), to the glamorous wish-fulfilment fantasy, clearly media-inspired, of riding 'through Paris, in a sports car, with the warm wind in her hair,' into which she finally and irrevocably withdraws. The song traces Lucy's progress through the sterile cleanliness of her world, in a single day, from her waking 'in a white suburban bedroom in a white suburban town,' to the moment when she is led down from her rooftop by a man (to whom she dutifully 'bows and curtsies') to 'the long white car that waited past the crowd': the sense of wasted potential, and specifically of *women's* potential in a male-constructed culture, could not be more devastatingly conveyed. Between them, Silverstein and Faithfull have produced a small masterpiece. Were one working with film students one might move usefully from *The Ballad of Lucy Jordan* to an analysis of *The Reckless Moment*.

Before passing to the comparison that provided the initial impetus for this article, I want to stress that the reader's agreement or disagreement with the judgement I have reached above seems to me of incidental importance. I offer it, in any case, merely as an example, which could of course be multiplied indefinitely. What is of primary importance are the premises and principles involved:

a. If art matters to us *as art*, and not merely as cultural data

for 'scientific' deconstruction — if we take it as an activity that engages, challenges, affects, modifies our sensibilities — then discrimination becomes an essential part of our critical activity as we experience a given work (at whatever level, conscious or unconscious, that activity operates).

b. The criteria by which we evaluate a work will differ somewhat not only on a basis of individual proclivity but culturally and historically, dependent upon the specific set of circumstances in which we find ourselves. My own criteria, for example, cannot be quite the same as Leavis's, not just because I am a different person but because I live in a different age and a very different cultural situation. (This is not to say that there is no correspondence whatever; simply that the two sets of criteria, while overlapping, are not and cannot be identical). My aim, therefore, is not to compel the reader to share my view (though it is obvious that, however fallible it may be, the *type* of judgement I have arrived at follows on from the premises), but rather to engage in an ongoing activity in which the activity itself (the complex process of experiencing, testing, weighing, comparing, pondering the work in its total context — authorial, generic, cultural, the audience it appears to address) is more important than the actual judgement reached.

c. A value-judgement must be at once moral, aesthetic and political, inseparably — though the last is given a particular edge by the contemporary crisis of our civilisation. The above comparison of *Miss Gee*, *Eleanor Rigby* and *The Ballad of Lucy Jordan* is an attempt to exemplify this, and the comparison of *The Big Heat* and *Kiss Me Deadly* that follows is another.

If these premises and principles are accepted, then they restore to art a valid and important role and function: as Leavis repeatedly insisted, a judgement about a work of art is a judgement about 'life.'

In the course on which I screened the two films, we discussed at great length the historical antecedents and development of *film noir*; the somewhat tedious and 'academic' question of whether it was a genre or a style; its relation to American (and, more widely, patriarchal capitalist) ideology; its relation to other genres, either precedent or contemporary (screwball comedy, the musical, the horror film, the World War II movie, the woman's melodrama) — the areas of difference and overlap . . . All of this proved profitable and important of course, but I found myself, increasingly, wanting to argue for the importance of discrimination between different works on quite traditional grounds that always came back, in the end, to the question of personal authorship: discriminations that drew necessarily on terms like 'intelligence,' 'sensitivity,' 'complexity' . . . I have mentioned the vague sense of guilt and uneasiness that this induced. It can be traced, I think, especially, to a fashionably dominant trend in film theory/criticism, the notion that what one should attempt to 'read' (or initiate a reading of, the process being by definition interminable) is the entire text in all its endless determinations. (John McCullough's article on *The Big Sleep* — 'Pedagogy in the Perverse Text' — in the last issue of *CineAction!*, than which you cannot get more fashionable, is a useful example). I think the attempt to decipher texts as cultural products without boundaries, interweaving infinitely with other texts both cinematic and non-cinematic, is very interesting and potentially very profitable; it is not what I personally wish to undertake, but I am certainly not 'against' it, on principle. What angers me is the arrogance of the assumption that this is now the 'only' way in

which we 'must' read texts. McCullough's tone, in the article cited, clearly tells us that it was very reprehensible of Michael Walker to offer an 'auteurist' reading of *The Big Sleep*: 'we' know better now (and, whatever he might have intended, McCullough's 'we' sounds suspiciously like the 'Royal We' to me). Why an attempt to read a film in one way for one purpose should invalidate attempts to read it in another way for a completely different purpose is a logic that escapes me. We are back with the 'either/or' syndrome, or, to take up my earlier comparison, with the desire to replace a lawn-mower with a hair-dryer: if I possess both hair and a lawn I can use both. There remains, of course, the question of what is most important within a given text. I can only repeat that, if a text is alive, it is animated by personal creativity, and it is the text's aliveness that interests me.

One evaluative comparison that arose on the course was between Altman's *The Long Goodbye* and Penn's *Night Moves*; but I have already made what seem to me the necessary points in the essay on Altman reprinted in *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, and (although it was written 15 years ago) seeing the two films again in close juxtaposition fully reconfirms my judgement then. I turn instead to *The Big Heat* and *Kiss Me Deadly*.

The outcome of the comparison (to avoid any suspense) — that Aldrich at his best was a very interesting director, Lang, when working with congenial material, a great one) will cause little surprise (and will presumably, to semioticians, amount to no more than a boring irrelevancy, if indeed it is allowed even to carry any meaning). What seems to me important is the grounds on which it can be based: especially in view of the fact that Aldrich's film is clearly the more 'satisfying' (i.e. coherent) of the two.

The comparison rests on the fairly close parallels between the two films. Both belong to the '50s, and are characterized by that period's mounting paranoia and potential hysteria, with the threats of nuclear power and the Cold War in the background (with *Kiss Me Deadly* one might rather say the foreground). They consequently belong to what one might see as the first (partially) revisionist period of film noir, wherein the figure of the investigator (clearly the moral centre of the '40s Hammett/Chandler adaptations) is subjected to scrutiny and criticism. (The second, far more drastic, revisionist period is the '70s, with *Night Moves* and *The Long Goodbye* as prime instances). The threat in both films is the 'greed for power: Lagana in *The Big Heat* wants to control the city; virtually all the characters of *Kiss Me Deadly* are trying to gain possession of 'the Great Whatsit,' which turns out to be nuclear energy itself, no less. In both, the hero's integrity/moral stature is called into question (ambiguously in Lang, unambiguously in Aldrich), and the criticism of the hero is articulated primarily through the women's roles. The dénouement, in each case, involves the downfall of the film's most prominent villain through a woman's violent actions (Debbie/Gloria Grahame revenges herself on Vince/Lee Marvin; 'Lily Carver'/Gaby Rodgers shoots Dr. Saborin/Albert Dekker) before the hero intervenes. A crucial step in the early stages of each narrative involves the murder of a woman (Lucy, Christina) precipitated by the fact that she has given the hero information, and made possible by the fact that, because of his contemptuous attitude toward her, he offers her insufficient protection.

One of the most impressive things about Aldrich's film is its relationship to Mickey Spillane's thoroughly obnoxious novel, of which the film constitutes a drastic critique. Spillane's totally unreflecting fantasy-identification with Mike Hammer — there seems no critical distance whatever

between author and character — is unambiguously rejected in favour of what amounts to a systematic discrediting of him.

The critique of the hero is clearly central to the progress of both films. In Aldrich this is far more devastating and uncompromised — but only because the overall vision is altogether simpler and cruder. Lang plainly dislikes Bannion/Glenn Ford, but cannot simply denounce him, as Aldrich can Hammer, because (a) he sees him as necessary to a culture that may not be entirely unredeemable (Hammer/Ralph Meeker is as necessary as a pain in the ass) and (b) he realizes that Bannion's virtues and flaws are inseparable from each other (Hammer has no virtues, he is all flaw). Bannion's virtues and flaws can be summed up in a single word: he is an idealist, always a problem for a pragmatic materialist like Lang. Hammer, on the contrary, is a mere vulgar materialist, like virtually everyone else in the film: the case is as simple as that. He is motivated by a greed that makes him indistinguishable from the nominal villains, and the means he employs are as callous and devoid of human caring as those of the FBI. The extraordinary, irresistible force of Aldrich's film is achieved at a certain cost: the elimination of all complexity of attitude.

In both films the critique of the 'hero' is effected primarily through the female characters. It is characteristic of *Kiss Me Deadly* that there this is achieved by direct and explicit denunciation: Christina/Cloris Leachman near the beginning and Velda/Maxine Cooper towards the climax, are both given speeches whose function is in effect to tell the audience what they are to think of Mike Hammer. Neither speech seems very clearly motivated in terms of the characterization and situation of the speaker: Christina has only just made Hammer's acquaintance, so that her insights into his character, while certainly valid, seem somewhat abrupt and rhetorical; Velda has been thoroughly complicit with him (to the point of prostituting herself at his instigation to incriminate errant husbands in divorce cases), bolstering his egoism, and her only reason for turning on him appears to be her recognition that this time he is involved in something much more dangerous than usual. At least the film never applauds her for 'devotion to her man,' but it is also clear that the women in the film, although they suffer in various ways and degrees, carry absolutely no moral weight. Both Christina and the false Lily Carver die because, like everyone else, they are pursuing 'the Great Whatsit'; as for Velda, what moral substance can we grant a character who devotes herself single-mindedly to the 'hero' the film despises and condemns?

The case is very different when we turn to *The Big Heat*. Here, the critique of the hero — itself a far more complex matter: Bannion, unlike Hammer, is a moral crusader from the outset, and subsequently motivated by his outrage at Katie's death — is dramatically enacted, not explicitly stated in somewhat arbitrary speeches: the evidence, I would claim, of Lang's far surer, finer, more complex grasp of his theme, the token of a finer mind and sensibility. Consider how our attitude to Bannion is defined (or more precisely redefined: hitherto we have seen only the idealism) in the scene in 'The Retreat' with Lucy Chapman early in the film. In retrospect from it, Bannion's automatic readiness to take Bertha Duncan on trust develops a fresh significance (we saw it earlier, I think, simply as an aspect of his moral goodness). With the confrontation with Lucy (for whose death Bannion is clearly responsible — he offers her no protection despite the fact that she has given him 'dangerous' information, and treats her with undisguised contempt because she doesn't measure up to his standards of bourgeois respectability) Lang shows



Kiss Me Deadly: Albert Dekker and Gaby Rodgers

us the other side of the idealism, a type of idealism that is usually a 'given,' an unquestioned positive, but is here subjected to astringent analysis: a self-righteous priggishness, class-based, that judges people purely in terms of their social position, and which blocks Bannion from any finer insights into character. (One might comment here, as an aside, on the perfect casting of Glenn Ford).

Lucy, shortly after she gives our idealist hero the crucial information he needs to start him on the track, and is summarily dismissed for her pains, is tortured to death. Her fate seals what is already clearly there in the scene in 'The Retreat,' our detachment from Bannion as an identification-figure: for Lang ensures that we see Lucy very differently from the way in which *he* sees Lucy. The critique of Bannion is developed through his dealings with and attitude to Debbie Marsh/Gloria Grahame (another instance of perfect casting!) I discussed this at some length in an article mainly on *Rancho Notorious* in the *Film Noir* issue of *CineAction!* (No. 13/14), and shall try not to repeat myself more than is necessary for my argument. Consider, however, Debbie's death scene near the end of the film. Earlier, Debbie, in love with Bannion (or, more precisely, in love with his perceived idealism, his moral integrity) has asked him to talk to her about his dead wife Katie/Jocelyn Brando, and Bannion, seeing her as a 'fallen woman' contaminated by her involvement with gangsters, in contrast to Katie's flawless, if somewhat artificially constructed, bourgeois purity, has shrunk in revulsion from doing so. At the end, he is able at last to grant Debbie's

wish for three reasons: (a) Debbie has murdered Bertha Duncan for him, with the gun he somewhat pointedly left with her, thereby exposing and destroying Lagana; (b) she has been instrumental in the arrest of Vince Stone; and, most important, (c) he perceives that she is dying: she can be safely sentimentalized, without the consequences of any awkward involvement or responsibility.

Between the death of Lucy Chapman and the death of Debbie Marsh (for both of which Bannion has a responsibility he never, in his smugness, allows himself to fully recognize, permitting the former by his negligence — Lucy is, after all, just a 'B-girl,' not a policeman's wife like Katie or Bertha Duncan — and precipitating the latter by insinuating Debbie into performing for him an action he is too 'moral' to perform himself) comes the brief but crucial appearance in the film of another female character, Selma Parker/Edith Evanson, the crippled woman who works for Dan Seymour's car-wrecking company. Her one scene (apart from a very brief reappearance when she identifies Lagana's henchman Larry for Bannion) occurs around the midpoint of the film, and provides the narrative with its turning-point. Without the slightest ostentation or underlining of 'significance,' Lang privileges Selma's intervention. Although she appears briefly in the background of the scene in her boss's office — and her reaction to Bannion there impresses itself — the image I think everyone retains is of her hobbling on her stick between the rows of wrecked cars toward Bannion, who is on the

other side of a chainmail fence. She defends her boss (who, out of fear, has refused to give Bannion information) — he 'isn't a *bad* man,' and after all, who else would employ a woman like herself? — before risking her own life (we know that she could easily join Lucy Chapman in the morgue) by telling Bannion what he needs to know. It's an extraordinary little scene — understated, almost thrown away: Selma is the one character in the film whose motives are absolutely pure. Lucy talks to Bannion because she was in love with Tom Duncan; Debbie acts because she is in love with Bannion. Selma has everything to lose and nothing whatever to gain, except self-respect. While Lang admires the other women, I think he invites us to put Selma (and what a little gem of a performance!) in a special category. *The Big Heat*, consistently, reveals a sensitive awareness of the social position of women, and offers a moving, unobtrusive tribute to their resilience, courage and tenacity, that *Kiss Me Deadly* needs, but entirely lacks.

The three female victims of Dave Bannion (if Selma survives, it is not *his* doing) are roughly paralleled by the three female characters of *Kiss Me Deadly*. If Aldrich's film offers an equivalent for the death of Katie Bannion, it is the death of Nick, Hammer's devoted 'best buddy.' This points to what is surely the film's most interesting aspect, a dimension lacking from *The Big Heat* and from Lang's work in general: its pervasive suggestion that the American construction of 'masculinity' (together with its accompanying paranoia) is built

upon the repression not only of the male's 'femininity' (which would account for Hammer's hatred of/contempt for women, the film's major debt to Mickey Spillane), but his innate homosexuality. It is a theme that Scorsese was to 'realize' fully and magnificently a quarter of a century later in *Raging Bull*; in Aldrich it remains a flickering, tantalizing implication, a 'subtext' in the strict sense, yet it is worth recalling that an interest in the ambiguities of gender and sexuality recurs spasmodically throughout Aldrich's work (and never in Lang's: the one apparent exception — the suggestion of homosexuality in the psychopath of *While the City Sleeps* — is treated entirely negatively, as no more than pathological symptom). *The Legend of Lylah Clare*, *The Killing of Sister George*, *The Choirboys*, are overt examples, but even a film like *All the Marbles*, with its 'tag team' of female athletes under an 'apathetic and non-athletic' manager, is relevant here. Aldrich's treatment of this theme is not notable for much complexity or sensitivity (the sledgehammer sensibility that is both the strength and limitation of *Kiss Me Deadly* prohibits any nuance), but its presence (which is perhaps, in subterranean forms, more pervasive than the few examples cited suggest) is partly responsible for the distinctive quality of his work.

It can certainly be argued (and I shall not dispute it) that *Kiss Me Deadly* is much the more striking of the two films. It has a force, directness and impact that one is never likely to forget, and isn't this the outward manifestation of an intense



The Big Heat: Dorothy Green as Lucy Chapman



Kiss Me Deadly: Ralph Meeker as Mike Hammer

creative energy? Fair enough: such a description acknowledges the film's undoubted distinction and testifies to its authenticity as a response to the contemporary cultural climate. With it must be considered the film's stylistic progressiveness (beside which *The Big Heat* appears decidedly conservative): 'Years ahead of its time, a major influence on French New Wave directors,' as Leonard Maltin's TV Movies guide (an indispensable barometer of contemporary taste) succinctly puts it. The influence seems to me unproven: the *Cahiers* critics adored the film, because it demonstrated again what could be achieved within a generally disreputable Hollywood genre, but I can't see that, when they made their films, they learnt much from it directly. It is one of those films that *appears* stylistically innovative, because it employs devices that one was not then accustomed to meeting within the general run of 'private eye' thrillers. In fact, its pervasive 'baroque' rhetoric (deep focus, strikingly extreme low- and high- camera angles) derives entirely from Welles and Toland: the 'innovation' lies in applying it to *film noir* (from whose world it was never entirely alien). It is certainly an audacious film; I don't think this is a valid reason for preferring it to a movie that is content to utilize (with great intelligence) the shooting/editing codes dominant in the Hollywood cinema. *The Big Heat* proves yet again (how many demonstrations does one need?) that those codes can be put in the service of subversive and radical purposes. Lang at his best (as he is in *The Big Heat*) is among the cinema's subtlest and most subversive moralists; Aldrich's moral sense does

not lend itself to the finer discriminations — which, it is worth insisting once again, are as much political as moral.

If both films depict a culture in which corruption is virtually all-pervasive, the world of *Kiss Me Deadly* is *just* corrupt, and there is little more to be said about it. Hammer is allowed one moment of grace: his grief over Nick's death, as he gets drunk in a bar: a moment that eloquently confirms one's sense that the emotional centre of the film is homoerotic (Hammer nowhere evinces this concern over women). Otherwise, the simplicity — the lack of complexity, of delicate exploration — of Aldrich's vision actually makes it much easier to enjoy *Kiss Me Deadly* on the superficial level on which genre movies are generally offered, the level that we call 'entertainment.' The to-hell-with-all-this, blow-it-all-up attitude to American civilisation actually provides a relatively easy excitement, satisfaction, exhilaration. (The studio, which added a final shot still there is some prints showing Hammer and Velda standing amid the waves, apparently safe, need not have worried: audiences generally seem to derive a lot of pleasure from the fact that Aldrich blows up *everybody*). Lang's cautious, probing attitude that qualifies every judgement makes an easy satisfaction impossible (we would get no satisfaction from blowing up a civilisation that contains Lucy Chapmans, Selma Parkers and Debbie Marshes). One is left with a sense of discord and disturbance — with the sense of a culture to whose problems there will be no easy solutions: a disturbance crystallized in the film's last line: 'Keep the coffee hot.'

AUTHORSHIP

by Richard Lippe

AND

Although much of the contemporary serious critical writing about the cinema is centred on the work of directors who have been identified as authors because of the stylistic and/or thematic consistency found in their films, the tendency among many critics is to ignore the issue of why it is that films having a strong authorial presence repeatedly solicit consideration. Seemingly, many critics have adopted the notion that the authorship controversy

gists has been such that, during the last 20 years, any film critic who doesn't fully ascribe to the principles of what has become known as 'modernist criticism' is in danger of being labelled passé by his or her colleagues; or, more damningly, as 'the death of the author' concept is bound-up with the rejection of 'bourgeois criticism' which has celebrated the author as a 'genius' who produces works that have a fixed meaning which, when deciphered, reveal universal 'truths' about the 'human condition,' the critic is likely to be thought of as being a political reactionary.

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ended in the late '60s and early '70s with the incorporation of semiotics into film and cultural studies. In particular, the theoretical writings of Roland Barthes have been of importance to those critics upholding this position and his essay "The Death of the Author,"¹ in which he maintains that any meaning(s) a written text generates are not the product of

an author's thought or intention as a text is produced by and through the concepts of language and ideology, is often cited as

the definitive pronouncement on the subject. In fact, the academic institutionalism of Barthes and other semiolo-

On the other hand, the concerns of feminist film theory and criticism indicate that the authorship issue is still controversial and significant. While the initial North American feminist critical writing on the mainstream cinema, e.g., Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape*, Marjorie Rosen's *Popcorn Venus* was primarily critical of the stereotyping of women's images, it was with the work of the British feminist critics and, in particular, Laura Mulvey's seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" that the thinking about film and sexual politics was fully given a theoretical dimension. In the mid '70s, *Screen* magazine, which had embraced the French semiotic-structuralist tradition, published Mulvey's piece in which she connected propositions from both Christian Metz's writings and Lacanian psychoanalytical theory to argue that the realist narrative film is structured by the workings of a patriarchal unconscious. According to Mulvey's theory,

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classical Hollywood narrative film uncategorically serves to reconfirm that the woman lacks the phallus; in turn, to counter the castration threat her presence on the screen evokes, a mainstream film offers the male gaze either the pleasure of seeing the woman as a fetishistic object or subjecting her to sadistic treatment. Presumably, Mulvey's proposition effectively makes authorship irrelevant; nevertheless, she chose two author identified directors, Sternberg and Hitchcock, to respectively illustrate how the mainstream narrative film reads as either a fetishistic or sadistic text.

Mulvey's semiological-psychoanalytical argument and the theoretical writings that have stemmed from her contentions withstanding, it is an indisputable fact that traditionally in the realm of cultural production the term authorship, when used to designate achievement, suggests the masculine domain; until very recently, mainstream cinema has been an area which men have had an almost exclusive control over financial and creative decisions and have been given the opportunities to create works that are regarded as self-expressive statements. For many feminists, then, men's work and accomplishments have been given much more than a sufficient recognition and celebration; and in practice, much of feminist writing has been oriented toward an investigation of genre film with concentration on those genres, the melodrama, the woman's film, film noir, in which 'women's issues' or strong female characters are central to narrative concerns. While these critical investigations may offer a consideration of a particular directorial presence, the tendency has been to avoid an extended examination of an individual male director and his films.

In light of the above-mentioned issues, it is of interest to this discussion that in the last few years two feminist critics have written books centred on male directors. In addition to Gaylyn Studlar's psychoanalytical reading of the Sternberg/Dietrich films,² there is Tania Modleski's *The Women Who Knew Too Much*³ in which she provides an in-depth analysis of seven Hitchcock films. In an introduction entitled "Hitchcock, Feminism, and the Patriarchal Unconscious," Modleski asserts that "... the films of Hitchcock have been central to the formulation of feminist film theory and to the practice of feminist film criticism." Modleski's observation is well-taken and suggests, I think, a necessity on her part to

acknowledge that a concept of authorship remains a relevant concern to contemporary theorists and critics. But, instead, Modleski side-steps the issue through her assessment of an article on *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* by Robin Wood;⁴ in addition to rejecting the notion that Wood (and, presumably, any other male critic) is capable of producing a feminist reading, she also says that his reasons for rethinking Hitchcock's films in supposedly feminist terms stems from an auteur critic's desire to "... reestablish the authority of the artist" Leaving aside the question of 'men in feminism,' Modleski invalidates Wood's writings because of his associations with auteurist criticism and she does so without bothering to produce an argument as to how Wood's feminist analysis of two Hitchcock films function in actual fact, as a defense of or celebration of Hitchcock as an auteur. She dismisses Wood's piece in a sentence saying "... he [Wood] proceeds to minimize the misogyny in them and to analyze both *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* as exposés of the twisted logic of patriarchy, relatively untroubled by ambivalence or contradiction." And, in keeping with this evasive tactic, Modleski concludes her discussion on authorship with the following sentences: "The feminist critics I have mentioned, by contrast, use Hitchcock's works as a means to elucidate issues and problems relevant to women in patriarchy. In so doing these critics implicitly challenge and decenter directorial authority by considering Hitchcock's work as the expression of cultural attitudes and practices existing to some extent outside the artist's control." The statement is, I think, unclear as to how she sees Hitchcock in relation to the films: on the one hand, Modleski isn't exactly claiming that Hitchcock's films contain no self-expression on his part but, on the other, she is giving the impression that authorial input is essentially irrelevant to these works which are of interest to women for cultural study purposes. But, if this is so, why have Modleski and other feminists concentrated on these particular films when the classical Hollywood cinema has produced a huge body of work that could be used to "... elucidate issues and problems relevant to women in patriarchy"? Alternatively, if Hitchcock's films are to some degree distinctive in their attitude toward women and gender relations, isn't it likely that there are other filmmakers who similarly produce works that can be distinguished in degree?

I do not intend the above comments

about Modleski's handling of the authorship issue to be taken as an attempt on my part to discredit her work as a critic or denigrate feminism's invaluable significance to film studies; the position underpinning the book ("... what I want to argue is *neither* that Hitchcock is utterly misogynistic *nor* that he is largely sympathetic to women and their plight in patriarchy, but that his work is characterized by a thoroughgoing ambivalence about femininity — ...") is persuasively developed through her insightful and provocative readings of the films. And, from another perspective, I think the work is to be regarded as a courageous effort — in addition to devoting an entire book to the films of a male director, she, in her introduction, discusses the problems inherent within the theoretical arguments mounted by several feminist writers. Rather, my aim is to provide an illustration of the dilemma authorship poses for many feminist critics and, more generally, the impasse that often occurs when the concept must be directly confronted.

As a response to the current situation, I want to review the works of several critics who have attempted to varying degrees to readdress the authorship issue giving weight to the complexities involved. Most prominent is John Caughie's book, *Theories of Authorship*⁵ an extremely useful anthology which provides a chronological account of approaches to authorship since the concept was officially introduced in *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the mid-'50s. The book is divided into three sections (auteurism, auteur-structuralism, "fiction of the author/author of the fiction") each having an introduction by Caughie which is followed by a collection of pertinent writings. In his preface, Caughie indicates that the intention behind the book isn't to show how auteurism gradually lost its significance to present day film studies but, rather, to chart the shifts in attitude towards the concept. Caughie begins with several well-known facts: 1) the origins of auteurism are found within a romantic aesthetic which is centered on individual creativity and, hence, at odds with a form of cultural production such as the mainstream cinema; 2) more importantly, there isn't a theoretical foundation underpinning auteurist criticism. In introducing the auteur-structuralist approach, he discusses the failure of what remains the singular attempt to produce a theory of authorship: an attempt which in part was discredited when it became evident that structuralist principles were being

applied in an ad hoc manner; but, on a more fundamental level, the 'theory,' as Caughie says, was based on reductive and empirical thinking. Furthermore, the auteur-structuralist contention, as exemplified in Peter Wollen's writings⁶ that a director's unconscious application of structural oppositions produces thematic consistency wasn't a satisfactory response to auteurist assertions regarding directorial intentionality.

Auteur-structuralism was part of movement to develop a more materialist and/or scientific approach to film study and, as such, it functions as a bridge to the incorporation of semiotics into the field. In his introduction to the third part of the book, Caughie begins by pointing out that semiotics, because it emphasizes subjectivity and textuality, pushed the previous concerns about the author into at most a marginal area. After dealing in detail with the major semiotic advancements, Caughie concludes by questioning the extent to which the tradition is inscribed within a formalism that denies certain aspects of cinematic subjectivity. In the course of this discussion, he says:

The recognition of intertextuality is important. We are no longer dealing with a pure text which inhabits a 'noiseless' space, containing all its meanings and effects within its own edges, or with an ideal spectator who comes to the text innocently, cleansed of the contagion of other films and other practices. The crack in the singular text's self-containment is opened wider by questions of subjects other than the purely textual subject — social subjects, sexual subjects, historical subjects — subjects who are constituted in a plurality of discourse (in an intertextuality of other texts) of which the single text is only one moment. For authorship, just as the ideal spectator existing outside history and sociality is an illusory figure, so also the ideal author, existing only inside the text, will have to be questioned.

Taking a different perspective, Caughie also suggests that the film spectator can experience during the viewing of a classic realist text moments of recognition of the author's presence (for instance, through a familiarity of a particular director's stylistic approach); this recognition, he designates as a form of 'performance' by the author which functions at least momentarily to direct the spectator's attention to the director as the subject of the film's discourse. Caughie questions how these moments

of recognition/performance on the spectator's part relate to a theory of cinematic subjectivity which doesn't allow for an authorial figure outside of the text itself. In turn, he places this recognition in a broader context:

This question overlaps with questions of ideology. What is the relation between film's production of ideology and its production of pleasurable recognition? Given that I am a social subject with a very different ideological formation from John Ford, what is the relation between my pleasure (and emotional involvement) in Ford's films (in the scene, say, of John Wayne's retreat from the army in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*), and my recognition of the marks of a Fordian discourse?

Considering the above-mentioned concerns and others, e.g., how does the notion of authorship relate to cinematic practices outside the mainstream cinema?, Caughie's book challenges the often given impression that there is nothing to be said about the issue. Unlike *Theories of Authorship*, the other works I am interested in are recently written studies centred on a specific director and his films. The writers, as I have indicated, vary in the extent to which they examine the authorship issue and its relation to contemporary criticism. While these critics have a vested interest in arguing that authorship remains a viable critical tool, the books weren't primarily written as projects advancing a theory of authorship; nevertheless, I don't think this invalidates the writer's contentions, as to why an authorial figure deserves recognition and investigation.

Christopher Faulkner, in *The Social Cinema of Jean Renoir*,⁷ takes the position that orthodox auteurism is based on a misguided premise — a filmmaker's body of work forms a coherent whole which is shaped by a unique and personal artistic sensibility that is trans-historical; the premise demands the repression of seeing the filmmaker and his films interacting with social, cultural and historical concerns and their determinants. With Renoir, Faulkner argues, contrary to traditional auteurist claims, there is no sustained 'world-view'; instead, there are several themes or positions that are given expression during the course of his career and these are predicated on Renoir's engagement with specific social and historical forces operating in his immediate surroundings. According to Faulkner, the contradictions between Renoir's prewar

and postwar films entail a move from an ideology of socialist politics to that of aesthetics and can only be accounted for by making the conjunction author/history/text.

Faulkner's demand for a contextualized study of directors and their films is, I think, important particularly as a corrective to the tenets of a Lacanian-informed semiotics which is, as he says of traditional auteurism, ahistorical in nature. And, significantly, his proposal isn't an attempt to reinstate the director as an authorial figure; rather, the primary emphasis is on seeing the films as products of historical forces. This is perhaps closer to what Modleski has in mind when she says that feminist critics want to "... use Hitchcock's works as a means to elucidate issues and problems relevant to women in patriarchy." But, on the other, as Faulkner remarks in his concluding paragraphs:

And in the twelve films I do examine, if certain structures and themes are ascribed to Renoir, sometimes for convenience, that is because I want to remind the reader that this private, material history acts with — interacts with — public history (social, cultural) to produce the work we know and admire;

and in the following paragraph:

Across thirty years and several distinct phases, these changing patterns represent the history of Renoir's — and no other film maker's — tension with this medium and his times. The advantage of focussing on the work of one filmmaker in this way is that we can see how his personal and social history make him the site for a succession of interrelated tensions that produce a rich and varied corpus. This about any film maker or any artist, is always a singular phenomenon, no matter how plural his work.

Most importantly, Faulkner's essential point isn't simply that every filmmaker is necessarily producing a body of film that is highly contradictory, when coherence is at issue, but, rather, that the filmmaker is, like the critic/spectator, a social subject interacting/producing the text(s) and also experiencing a lived existence in a social history which although having powerful ideological determinants isn't mechanistically determined. His argument for the rethinking of authorship historically raises pertinent concerns about the classical realist cinema and its capacities to be used in a critical and progressive

manner to address the conflicts and tensions found within the dominant ideology.

Unlike Christopher Faulkner, Peter Brunette is clearly uncomfortable about defending authorship and in the preface to his book, *Roberto Rossellini*,⁸ Brunette deals with the concept in three short and cryptic paragraphs. He, nevertheless, takes up what has been often considered the central point of contention "... the thorny, probably unresolvable question of intentionality." While Brunette rejects the intentionality argument of traditional auteurism, he claims that intentionality cannot totally be dismissed; there is, he suggests, a point at which the notion must be accepted by the critic/spectator if the text is to have meaning. To some extent, an engagement is dependent upon a belief that the work has been created with purpose or direction in mind on the artist's part. Brunette sees the text, like its author, as being informed by the demands of the dominant ideology but, on the other hand, he suggests that the director's intentions or conscious decisions give a specific inflection to the subject matter making the work distinctive in degree. While Brunette cautiously equates intention with consciousness, it should be noted that the author's unconscious motivation can be a significant factor in the shaping of a work.

In addition to the question of intentionality, Brunette, in his discussion of authorship, considers the relationship between critical interpretation and essentializing. He says,

Thus, centering one's discussion around films made by a given director seems to me equally distorting and equally true. The solution is perhaps not to seek the *real* Rossellini, the *essence* of Rossellini — for in this way one always represses whatever does not fit — but rather to content oneself with an exploration of theme, techniques and concerns. Strictly speaking, it is impossible to get around essentializing, and this book is no exception, but at least if the critic is self-aware in this matter, the worst excesses can be avoided.

In *The Social Cinema of Jean Renoir*, Faulkner identified the tendency to essentialize as a fundamental error within orthodox auteurism but it is as much a tendency in semiotic theorizing.

Of the recent books on directors, Robin Wood's *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, provides undoubtedly the most ambitious and thorough discussion of

why the attempts to dismiss authorship have been unsatisfactory. In Wood's view, the excesses of the original conception of auteurism were thrown into relief with the introduction of the concept of ideology and the recognition that a film has multiple determinants; but, in turn, the concept of ideology or more specifically the notion of an all-pervasive dominant ideology which shapes the social and the cultural has led to an attempt by semiotics to produce a wholesale dismissal of traditional aesthetics. Acknowledging that the semiotic tradition has significantly contributed to the advancement of film theory and criticism, Wood questions the thinking underpinning a film theory concept that denies any degree of control, responsibility or self-definition to a person accredited with the production of a text — i.e., in his *Screen* piece of *Touch of Evil*, Stephen Heath sums up Orson Welles's relation to the film as "an effect of the text."

Wood's defense of a notion of authorship is in part built on a well-argued discussion of the deficiencies and/or problems inherent in the major semiological writings (in addition to Heath's *Touch of Evil* article, Wood addresses *Cahier's Young Mr. Lincoln* analysis and the positions of Peter Wollen and Raymond Bellour) on authorship and the text; but it is equally predicated on his cogent responses to the major issues of the authorship debate. Although I think the five points of contention that Wood identifies and addresses are of a piece and cannot be used independently to contest the juggernaut that semiotics has constructed, I nevertheless want to single out two observations he makes that seem to me particularly important: 1) in 'the author's intentions' section,

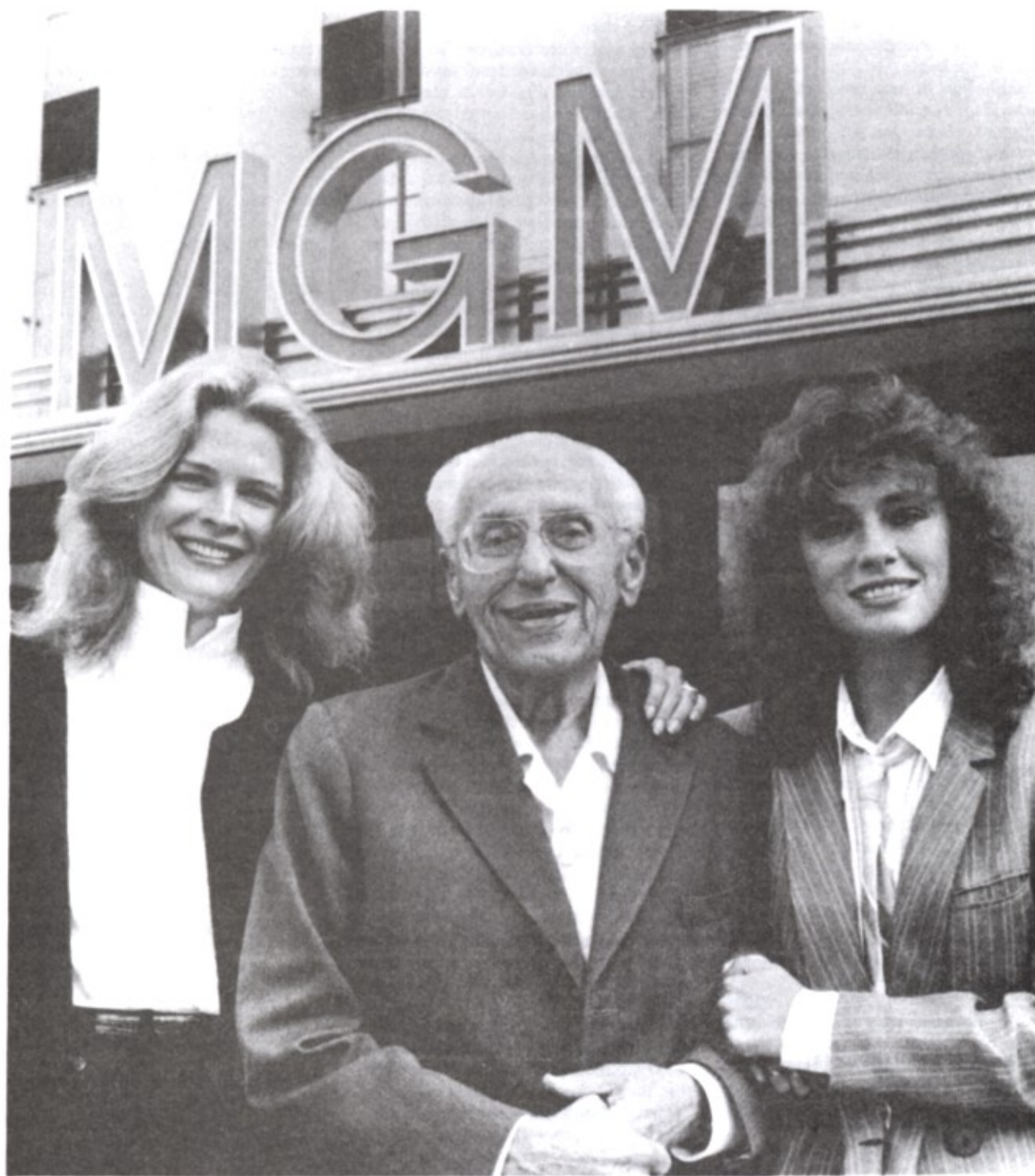
To reject the "intentionalist fallacy" ... is not to reject the fact that on certain levels the creation of a work of art or an artifact constitutes an intentional act. Hitchcock generally knew — I repeat, on certain levels — why he wanted to place his camera where he did, why he wanted to move it, why he wanted to cut, why he wanted his actors to move certain ways, turn their heads at certain moments, speak their lines with certain intonations. This fully conscious, intentional level cannot possibly account for everything in the film and cannot account for the more important, deeper levels of meaning; but I cannot see that it is irrelevant or unworthy of consideration;

2) and, in the 'Narrative pattern/ Generic conventions' section,

Whether on the level of the individual or that of the political collective (a collective is composed of individuals), significant art arises out of the artist's appropriation and transformation of forms, structures, conventions, that already exist. Like the artist, those forms, etc., are ideologically determined, though, again, not in any simple, absolute or exclusive way: like the individual, they exhibit, on inspection, the principles of resistance, conflict, and contradiction. The process of appropriation and transformation — as opposed to mere inert reproduction — is of course crucial: if a given form (a Hollywood genre, for example) is structured ideologically, it follows that a transformation of that structure also affects its ideological meaning.

To a great extent, the rejection of a notion of authorship is restricted to films produced within the Hollywood cinema. A formalist critic such as David Bordwell, for instance, argues in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*⁹ that Hollywood directors were at the mercy of the system which primarily functioned to produce a sleek, standardized product which 'speaks' the voice of the dominant ideology and nothing else; on the other hand, he writes a book on Ozu's films which were also produced within a commercial cinema and are, after all, about bourgeois life and *can* be read as celebrations of middle class ideals and values. Presumably, Ozu's work qualifies for authorial consideration because he doesn't preserve the stylistic codes of the Western cinema, i.e., the films are seen as progressive. This distinction, it seems to me, is very dubious.

My commitment to a modified form of auteurism in which the director, as Wood puts it, functions as an "intervention" in the construction of the text isn't intended as a response to feminism's resistance to masculine dominance; while I think this is an important issue and needs to be kept in mind, I don't believe authorship concerns can be contained within the domain of sexual politics. I also think that it is essential to recognize creative subjectivity — if we intend to grow politically from an interaction with the culture it is necessary to accord respect to the producers of those achievements that embody human creativity and intelligence. Otherwise, we are in danger of using other



Publicity shot for *Rich and Famous*: Cukor with Candice Bergen and Jacqueline Bisset

human beings and their accomplishments to flatter our own sense of self-worth. In this context, a consideration of an author's presence within the text can possibly produce a richer and more nuanced reading which, in turn, contributes to a better understanding of the spectator's own subjectivity as a social and sexual being.

Although it was necessary to the growth of film theory to challenge the original conception of auteurism, it seems counter productive to insist that the issue must be seen in the terms of the opposition auteurism/realist cinema = reactionary and semiotics/modern cinema = progressive. In fact, I would think that such a reductive schema would demand an interrogation; on the other hand, the division, not without irony, has been given an academic endorsement that has unfortunately led to making its acceptance essential to building a career within what has increasingly become a conservative, mechanistic educational system.

Cukor, Hollywood and Criticism

In the heyday of auteurist criticism, there was considerable speculation as to whether or not Cukor was an auteur. Although many critics acknowledged that Cukor was responsible for numerous outstanding films which conveyed the mark of a personal involvement, the 'problem' was that the films didn't seem to reveal sufficiently, either stylistically or thematically, what made them distinctively a product of Cukor's sensibility.¹⁰ In addition to finding the director's signature elusive, these critics tended to read Cukor and his films from a perspective that worked to confirm his 'lack' when he was compared to directors perceived to be genuine auteurs such as Hitchcock, Howard Hawks or John Ford. There was the fact that Cukor's origins were in the theatre and a large number of his films were based on adaptations of plays; this implied that Cukor was essentially a theatrical director at heart concerned primarily with the text and didn't have a strong feeling for or commitment to the innate properties of the medium itself. On his part, Cukor concurred with this evaluation; in interviews, he repeatedly acknowledged his commitment to and dependency on the text and said he wasn't interested in 'pure' cinema — there are no Cukor interviews in which he talks extensively about the mapping out of a shot, the planning of technical strategies. To further reinforce the per-

ception that Cukor wasn't fully attuned to the cinematic, these critics pointed out that while individual films may express a certain stylistic flair there was no consistent visual style to Cukor's oeuvre; through the years, there were distinct changes in the visual conception which were influenced by the present-day dictates of fashion and the industry, e.g., in the late '40s, Cukor abandoned the 'glossy' studio-bound visuals and adopted the 'realist' aesthetic. When judged on the basis of a stylistic approach, the films allowed for a questioning of the degree to which Cukor relied on others or external forces to impose a visual conception on his work. Similarly, when it came to a Cukor thematic, the films seemingly failed to provide a pronounced orientation to the material; furthermore, Cukor freely admitted that he didn't participate in the actual writing of the scripts he filmed.

Included in the perspective used to evaluate Cukor and significantly contributing to the perception that he was less than a top-ranking filmmaker was his reputation as a 'woman's director.' Like the film industry itself, many auteurist critics were sexist and couldn't conceive of a 'woman's director' as having a strong sensibility. At that time, Cukor's gayness wasn't public knowledge; undoubtedly, had it been known, it would have been a major component in further diminishing his identity and achievements. That Cukor was gay is highly relevant to any serious critical discussion of his work; it is also relevant to a discussion of the Hollywood cinema which remains to the present-day a homophobic institution. In the discussion below, I want to raise various issues about Cukor, Hollywood and criticism; in part, I want to indicate why I think Cukor deserves recognition as an auteur but, on the other hand, I do not predicate my interest in certain Cukor films solely on their status as auteurist works.

In the late '70s and early '80s, the Hollywood cinema produced several gay and lesbian themed films, e.g., *Cruising*, *Making Love*, *Personal Best*; the films were made in response to the growing visibility of the gay and lesbian communities and the general public's ambivalent fascination with alternative sexual practices. For a brief moment, it appeared that the film industry was on the brink of openly acknowledging gays and lesbians as having a viable social and sexual identity within society at large. But, of course, when it became evident that none of these films were to

be huge commercial successes, Hollywood quickly abandoned any interest in dealing in depth with such subject matter. Although the film industry had decided this prior to the AIDS epidemic, the disease and the rampant homophobia it brought to the surface in virtually every sector of our society was an added factor in silencing the industry on gays. That the industry was highly homophobic despite the fact that many of its members were gays or lesbians was never in doubt but this issue came forcibly into light with the revelation that Rock Hudson was an AIDS victim and gay. Hudson's gayness had been the subject of speculation for years but his involuntary admission carried weight and posed a problem for the film industry concerning its attitude. In part, because of the tragic circumstances surrounding Hudson's revelation of his sexual preference, the situation was explosive and contained the potential for the mainstream press to mount an attack on the hypocrisy of the film industry. Predictably, the mainstream press defused the threat posed to present-day Hollywood through such strategies as playing up the moral and ethical concerns raised by Marc Christian's claim that Hudson knowingly endangered his welfare (in addition to further discrediting the already discredited Hudson, it reinforced for heterosexuals the belief that gays are irresponsible and opportunistic) and, in regard to the industry, implying that Hudson's secretiveness and the studio's cover-up were a product of a bygone era — unlike the tolerant '80s, the '50s was a period in which the public considered homosexual desire and practices offensive.

On the other hand, soon after Hudson's death, several journals published articles which countered the notion that the contemporary film industry is any less homophobic than it had been in the past; gays and lesbians who want to be open are under pressure to stay in the closet if they want to keep their jobs or advance and, for many others, an internalized guilt about their sexual orientation makes threat measures unnecessary. Appearing in marginal or alternative publications, these articles didn't reach a wide readership and cannot seriously challenge the homophobic policies of either the mass media of the film industry itself; and, as Andrew Holleran suggests in his article "New York Notebook: Rock's Life," the relationship between the media and the general public is such that each mirrors the other:

Both the Liberace and Rock Hudson movies balanced an odd combination of blandness and sadness — presented taboo subject matter in a way that confirmed the views of the people who made it taboo. The homophobia that is the subject of the movies, seemed also the climate in which the movies were made.

Nevertheless, since the late '70s a substantial and growing body of literature predominantly produced by gay journalists, writers and critics has been an important contribution to publicly voicing the experiences, attitudes and perceptions gay people have held about themselves and their relation to the film industry. In this context, Boze Hadleigh's interview book *Conversations With My Elders*,¹⁴ is particularly fascinating; the book consists of six interviews which were conducted on the basis that the interviewee was explicitly acknowledging his gay identity. The subjects interviewed include, in addition to Rock Hudson, George Cukor whose responses are characterized by Quentin Crisp in his introduction as exhibiting, like those of Luchio Visconti, a "... certain slyness."¹⁵

Within the interview text, Hadleigh, who obviously greatly admires Cukor and his work and offers an eloquent introductory discussion of the director's position within an industry that slighted his accomplishments because he didn't cultivate the prototypical image of the Hollywood director as a man's man, e.g., John Huston, Hawks, Ford, etc., summarizes Cukor as being a person who refused to reveal very much about himself and the interview verifies this. Cukor blocks Hadleigh's attempts to solicit revelations regarding either his sexual or romantic life or that of others purportedly gay and, to an extent, the content of the interview doesn't greatly differ from those given previously in which his gayness wasn't recognized. Yet, while he distanced himself from an overtly personal interrogation from Hadleigh, Cukor managed to speak unguardedly about himself and the industry when given a more generalized context. When Hadleigh questions Cukor about his response to the fact that James Whale's career was aborted because he lived openly as a homosexual, he replies,

I've tried to keep out of politics. I only wanted to work. Yes. Yes, it did sadden and depress me, what happened to some of my colleagues. What could one do then? Until the '60s almost nothing

changed. If you were not heterosexual, you were discreet. I'm sure the victims were aware of this rule, but possibly it was too difficult for them to follow.

Cukor may have been by nature a discreet person but his survival in Hollywood demanded that he be so; after spending over 50 years under such conditions, it isn't surprising that he couldn't be more forthcoming about himself. Ultimately, what Cukor chose to divulge to Hadleigh is of less importance than his decision to agree to the interview. In their discussion, Cukor suggests that as an older person/director he can afford to be more candid because the public isn't any longer greatly interested in his sexual identity; while the observation has a certain validity, it doesn't do justice to Cukor himself and the weight the revelation carries. Cukor, as the above quotation indicates, lived the greater part of his life in a social environment that allowed for no visible support of his identity as a gay person; when such support was offered, through the politization of the gay community, he responded with strength and resolve. Although it had been widely rumoured since the late '60s that Cukor was gay, he could have continued to remain silent about his sexual orientation. Cukor's decision to speak out is significant as a political act; in addition to defying Hollywood's dictum that such information is kept within the industry, he officially sanctioned his work as a contribution to gay culture.¹⁶

In the forward to *Conversations With My Elders*, Quentin Crisp identifies both Luchino Visconti and Cukor as Europeans; the erroneous assumption that Cukor was an immigrant has been frequently made by people not familiar with his biography. Most likely, the attribution is based on Cukor's reputation as a filmmaker whose work is characterized by qualities usually associated with a European sensibility e.g., grace, charm and sophistication. On the other hand, what is perceived as being European about his films may stem from Cukor's tendency to avoid genres — the gangster film, the western, the war film — which archetypically define the American ethos and its particular concept of masculinity. In any case, Cukor's films are most often set in America and reveal him to be very much attuned to the social and sexual mores of his quintessentially American characters. If Cukor's films differ from that of other male filmmakers who define the American sensibility, it is his repeated centring of the films on a

female protagonist(s), e.g., *Little Women*, *Holiday*, *Born Yesterday*, *The Actress*, etc., and her attempts to grapple with the social, sexual and economic inequalities of a supposedly democratic nation. Aside from the films themselves but not without significance to their disposition, the labelling of Cukor as European can be traced on a more directly personal level to his position in Hollywood. As numerous articles on and interviews with Cukor attest, although several major actresses were his friends, e.g., Katharine Hepburn, Vivien Leigh, Greta Garbo, his primary social relations were the prominent theatrical and literary figures who didn't belong to the Hollywood community, e.g., Ethel Barrymore, Somerset Maugham, Aldous Huxley, etc.;¹⁶ and, a great number of these friends were Europeans who, for one reason or another (in the late '30s and early '40s, Hollywood became a refuge for European intellectuals fleeing from Naziism), found themselves temporarily living on the fringes of the film colony. Cukor, who delighted in the glamour that once personified the industry owning what was considered one of the community's most beautiful and elegantly furnished houses, wasn't anti-Hollywood, but the intellectual and creative stimulation these people provided must have been a factor in his cultivating their friendship. And, perhaps, Cukor empathized with others who were considered outsiders to the community;¹⁷ undoubtedly, Cukor's gayness would have been much less an issue within this social circle which in addition to containing numerous gays and lesbians had no vested interest in maintaining a public image of the sexual 'norm.' In a sense, then, Crisp isn't totally inaccurate in identifying Cukor as a European.

In regard to Cukor's identity as a gay in his professional status and achievements, there are several issues to be taken up. In his commentary accompanying the book's interview, Hadleigh refers to Cukor's "artistic conservatism" — particularly when it came to dealing with gay or semi-gay themes; he suggests the commercial failure of *Sylvia Scarlett*, a film which highlights cross-dressing and gender ambiguity, deterred Cukor from further exploring such material and that, later, in the more sexually explicit post-1960s Hollywood environment, Cukor's ingrained reticence and cautious attitude towards risk-taking prevented him from working regularly. While Hadleigh's comments are relevant, I think that he tends to simplify the matter. Although Cukor

may have put a premium on being known as a commercially successful director, he was in an awkward position during Hollywood's classical period regarding the sexual implications of his projects. Conceivably, Cukor, given his desire to survive in the industry, would have been wary about material that might in any way imply a homosexual orientation on his part. But, during the '30s, Cukor's projects are no more conservative in their sexual thematic than the films of other gay directors e.g., James Whale, Edmund Goulding, Mitchell Leisen. Possibly, Leisen's 'camp' films e.g., *Murder at the Vanities*, *Lady in the Dark*, are the closest a gay director comes to openly acknowledging his sexual orientation but, then, Busby Berkeley, a heterosexual, directed the greatest number of camp classics. In fact, in addition to the audacious treatment of gender and sex roles found in *Sylvia Scarlett*, Cukor's *Little Women* and *Holiday*, while more conventional projects, are, nevertheless, as Andrew Britton convincingly argues in *Katharine Hepburn: The Thirties and After*,¹⁸ works that implicitly construct the Hepburn characters' personas as being, respectively, lesbian and bi-sexual.

In his remark about *Sylvia Scarlett*, Hadleigh isolates Cukor and the films from a historical context. Despite the installation of the Hays Code in the early '30s, the decade, unlike the '40s, was essentially receptive to and progressively dealt with sex-gender issues — Hawks was never again as playful about sex-gender transgressions as he is in *Bringing Up Baby*. And, arguably, Cukor's *Adam's Rib* can't be totally dismissed as 'artistic conservatism' on his part; the film, like *Little Women* and *Sylvia Scarlett*, features cross-dressing and, in addition to raising the issue of sex-gender inequality, contains a supporting male character whose sexual orientation is ambiguous. (The David Wayne character is highly problematic in that the film encourages the viewer to read the character as homosexual while insisting that he is heterosexual — Wayne's non-sexual presence and persona compounds the confusion and, in any case, the film seems to be employing Wayne's sexual ambiguity to reaffirm the already unquestionable heterosexual orientation of the film's major characters.) Even during the most conservative of decades, the 50s, Cukor, as I argue in my discussion of *A Star Is Born* indicates, as the earlier William Wellman version doesn't, that the James Mason character is racked by insecurities about both his future as an actor and his iden-

tity as a masculine male. Also, it was in the '50s that Cukor, according to several of his interviews,¹⁹ rejected the opportunity to direct a film version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* because the studio insisted on deleting the play's homosexual implications which, he felt, were essential to the conflicts of the material dramatized.

Interestingly, Tennessee Williams' play pointedly places homosexual desire squarely within a context which makes intimate physical contact between men palatable to the heterosexual male — the sports world. Like certain literary and filmic genres, e.g., the action adventure drama, the western, the sports world celebrates the masculine; at the same time, it allows for the idealization of male bonding while masking the romantic and sexual (and misogynist) impulses involved in the bonding. Cukor's rejection of the bowdlerized version of Williams' play is consistent with his avoidance of masculine genres; and, in particular, the male buddy film with its sublimated homo-eroticism and token female character who is used to substantiate the heterosexual orientation of the male protagonists. Perhaps it takes a director like Hawks, with his own unique brand of sublimated homo-eroticism, to undertake such a genre without inhibitions. (In Hawks' films, male bonding and homo-eroticism exist without misogyny; in contrast, Orson Welles, who is much more cryptic about but similarly engaged in the depiction of homosexual desire, displays a very strong misogynistic streak, e.g., *Citizen Kane*, *The Lady from Shanghai*, *Touch of Evil*.) In Cukor's case, whether it was a question of inhibition or honesty (a refusal to condone the genre's inherent repressiveness) is a matter for speculation, but his rejection of the studio's version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* suggests the latter.

Among his Hollywood peers, Cukor was the only director to be referred to as a 'woman's director'²⁰; the label, in addition to carrying a sexist connotation, functioned simultaneously to segregate him from the masculine sphere and marginalize his accomplishments. On the one hand, that he was skillful in directing actresses is a fact and deserves recognition; but, on the other, the designation 'woman's director,' which is how he continues to be categorized, says nothing about women and images in Cukor's films. Given the emphasis placed on Cukor's professional relations with actresses and production of women-centred films, it is striking that there is no specific actress

who, or female image which, exemplifies the 'Cukor woman.' Although the long-standing Cukor/Katharine Hepburn collaboration is often mentioned (and Cukor/David O. Selznick initiated Hepburn's film career with *A Bill of Divorcement*), the Hepburn persona wasn't primarily developed by Cukor; rather, through the years, Cukor assisted Hepburn in bringing out various aspects of her persona. With Cukor, there is no equivalent to that of Hawks' molding Lauren Bacall into the 'Hawksian woman.' Hitchcock's attempt to construct Tippi Hedren into a Hitchcockian 'blonde'; or the Sternberg/Dietrich collaboration. Significantly, for these directors, the actress and the image were intended to serve the directors' thematic concerns and their particular concept of heterosexual relations. (This isn't to say that the female images employed by Hawks, Hitchcock and Sternberg are one dimensional or simply reducible to male fantasy figures; on the contrary, the work of these directors often contains compelling and, at times, complex images of women.) In contrast, Cukor's work resists, as many auteurist critics have commented, an easily identifiable thematic pattern, which tends to suggest that there is no prototypical 'Cukor woman' because he lacks consistency. Ignoring for the moment the question of his thematics, there is, arguably, another way of approaching Cukor's relation to his actresses and their image; to his credit, Cukor doesn't impose his conceptions onto the actress/ character which, of course, doesn't mean that he relinquishes participation in the conceptualizing process between director/ actress/characterization; instead, as the films indicate, what Cukor appreciates about these women (as actresses-characters) are their autonomy and individuality. (In this respect, Cukor and Jean Renoir are similarly inclined; in such diverse Renoir films as *La Fille de L'eau*, *Madame Bovary*, *Diary of a Chambermaid* and *The Golden Coach*, the actresses' persona predominantly shapes the image and, as with Cukor, there isn't a female image which Renoir specifically constructed to define himself.) While he was instrumental in forming the budding personas of several actresses' (and actors) e.g., Joan Fontaine, Rosalind Russell, Jane Fonda, Cary Grant, Aldo Ray, etc., Cukor's most impressive collaborations were with actresses who had already developed highly distinctive personas before working with him, e.g., Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, Judy Garland, etc.



A Woman's Face: Melvyn Douglas and Joan Crawford

Clearly, the star system is complex; the star's persona and presence usually demands continuity. This demand isn't simply a reaffirmation of the star's image but may involve components 'external' to the persona/presence e.g., genre, identification with comedy or drama, the happy ending, etc. But, in numerous films, Cukor expanded on and enriched a female star's persona and, correspondingly undercut the archetype on which the persona had been originally built. Subjected to the ideological constraints of the Hollywood cinema, the narrative trajectory of the films, in some instances e.g., *A Woman's Face*, *Two-Faced Woman*, mediates against the progressive aspects of the characterization Cukor and his actresses have established; nevertheless, the 'denial' of what gave the characterization originality and force cannot be erased.

In discussing women's images in his films, it is necessary to place Cukor, his collaborations and the films in their proper historical context. Cukor largely worked within a cultural environment that held extremely traditional views regarding sex-gender roles. In the decades that Cukor worked most regularly, there was no visible feminist movement in operation; it is therefore most unrealistic to suggest that he should consistently depict women's identities and relations from a stance which would demand an informed political consciousness on these issues. In reading the films from a contemporary perspective, the critic must be sensitive to the climate in which the filmmaker worked; although Cukor undertook several projects which are, from a feminist position, sexist and misogynist, this doesn't mean that the films are accurate reflections of his actual disposition.

Writing on Katharine Hepburn in *Holiday*, James Naremore, in *Acting the Cinema*, flatly identifies Cukor as a misogynist. In a footnote on Hepburn's career, he says:

... At MGM, she also worked regularly with her friend Cukor, but scholars make an error when they describe him as an especially sensitive exponent of women's concerns: indeed, some of Cukor's typical films — such as *The Women* (1939) and *Les Girls* (1957) — are profoundly misogynistic.

Naremore essentially makes this claim on the strength of two films, of which he provides no discussion. Nor does he indicate how or why these two films are 'typical' Cukor works — does he consider *Holiday* as a 'typical' Cukor film and, therefore, misogynist? Andrew Britton's rigorous feminist reading of the film, in *Katharine Hepburn: The Thirties and After*,²⁰ doesn't implicate Cukor as being either a sexist or misogynist. As for *The Women* and *Les Girls*, the former was originally to have been directed by Ernst Lubitsch but MGM assigned Cukor the project after David O. Selznick dismissed him from *Gone With the Wind*.²² Undoubtedly, Cukor was anxious about his professional future and wanted to prove himself to the industry. In addition to being a big budget project and a very commercial property, *The Women* featured an all-female cast making Cukor a logical directorial choice. Clare Boothe's play in the late '30s, was perceived as a satire on women's identities; it belongs to a period which hadn't been exposed to feminist thinking. As both the play and the screen adaptation were authored by women,²³ *The Women*, to a present-day feminist, exists as an exercise in self-oppression. Given Cukor's situation and the pervasive political circumstances, his participation in the project is hardly reducible to an expression of Cukor's (as Naremore contends) misogynistic impulses. Judging from interviews,²⁴ Cukor saw the project as an opportunity for certain actresses, specifically, Joan Crawford, Joan Fontaine and Rosalind Russell, to develop their personas; in that area, Cukor felt that he was able to contribute and it was their successes that made the film a meaningful experience. Although Cukor's professional position wasn't in jeopardy when *Les Girls* was produced, the issues are not totally dissimilar. Ostensibly, *Les Girls* is a Gene Kelly vehicle but the film, as it exists, belongs to Kay Kendall. Based on the story by

Vera Caspary and scripted by John Patrick of *Little Me* fame, the material belongs to the kind of satire that spawned *The Women*. Need it be said once again, that the '50s, in particular, was not a progressive decade in regard to women's images and issues? (In 1956, a year before *Les Girls*, *The Opposite Sex*, a remake of *The Women*, was a commercial success.) In any case, a discussion of *Les Girls* as a misogynist film has to take into account Kelly's character and its implications. The character isn't in any sense endorsed and the film makes clear that it is masculinist egoism that causes the dissension among the women. Furthermore, the film is so completely empathetic with the Kendall character that to disregard her character/presence calls into question an understanding of what feminist concerns are really about. In his political denouncement of Cukor, Naremore neglects to mention *The Philadelphia Story* (a remake, *High Society*, was released in 1956) which, in regard to Hepburn/Cukor, should be the ultimate and most perverse illustration of Cukor the sexist/misogynist, given that Cukor in the '30s, was instrumental in constructing the Hepburn persona as radical; but, the play and film are, in their 'democratizing' of the Hepburn persona, precisely what Hepburn initiated. In 1940, Hepburn was trying to revive a cinematic career and Cukor assisted and, actually, stunningly. I am not trying to mount an apology for Cukor or, for that matter, the women involved in these projects but, on the other hand, I don't think it is either valid or productive to extrapolate these works out of their context to make judgemental pronouncements.

Before returning to a discussion of Cukor and auteurism, I would like to address another issue that has been raised about Cukor and women's images. In an interview,²⁵ Carlos Clarens, author of *Cukor*,²⁶ says, rightly, that Cukor's films and their depictions of women haven't attracted feminists. He states that feminists:

are more at home with [Ingmar] Bergman's antagonism towards them than they are with Cukor's idealism. Maybe they feel that Bergman brings them closer to the truth, no matter how unpleasant, than Cukor ever will.

(In turn, Clarens' statement suggests an antagonistic impulse towards feminists.) As both Bergman and Cukor are known for their abilities to direct actresses, the comparison is particularly apt, but

Clarens' description — Bergman's antagonism versus Cukor's idealism — is a simplification. Bergman's intense probing of women's psyches does, at times, suggest that he is unnecessarily indulging in a desire to depict women experiencing pain, suffering and defeat; on the other hand, Bergman seems to identify strongly with his female characters. And, then, although Bergman's collaboration with his actresses is often commented on, he is primarily responsible for the conception of the women's identities. Like Hitchcock and Hawks, Bergman fashions his women to express his vision which has led to feminist criticism of Bergman's ideas about women's needs and desires;²⁷ nevertheless, the range of attitudes Bergman expresses towards his female characters isn't reducible to just antagonism. Conceivably, to a degree, feminists have concentrated on Bergman because he is a 'serious' director identified with 'art,' ethics and the psychoanalytical; with few exceptions, e.g., Hitchcock and Sternberg, the women's images found in the work of Hollywood directors has

been dismissed by feminists as stereotypical imaging. Another concern, in relation particularly to Cukor's films, is that the films are often identified as an actress' vehicle, i.e., Garbo's *Camille*, Garland's *A Star Is Born*; until recently, there hasn't been a cultural study interest in stars and it isn't an area which has strongly engaged feminists in either the past or the present.

In discussing Cukor, Clarens says:

Cukor's appreciation of women was not realistic in anyway For Cukor, a woman is a great actress — nothing less. And nothing more Cukor liked his women full of spunk and fire, but his men were inobtrusive.

Clarens' comments on Cukor are in response to the interviewer's suggestion that Cukor, as a gay, didn't understand 'a woman's reality.' As I have mentioned, the same has been said of Bergman; in his case, it is because he's heterosexual. As with Bergman, I think Cukor's orientation to his female characters is more diverse and complex than



Les Girls: Mitzie Gaynor, Kay Kendall, Gene Kelly, Tania Elg.

Clarens allows for. Cukor's films combined provide a wide range of women's identities and the options that are available to women within a specific social-sexual-economic instance. In Cukor's films, women, as Clarens says earlier in the interview, are strong, but the characterizations are usually finely shaded; the women remain vulnerable while confronting their positions within a social structure that is predominantly hostile to a woman's attempt at self-expression. On the other hand, Cukor doesn't concentrate, as do such 'women's directors' as Max Ophüls and Kenji Mizoguchi, on woman as victim which shouldn't be taken as an indication that he isn't 'realistic' about women's identities; nor does Cukor, as the term 'idealism' suggests, gravitate toward certain archetypal female images: the woman as wife-mother, the virgin/whore dichotomy. When Cukor is confronted with material that relies heavily on female stereotyping such as *The Women*, the result is a strained and unevenly pitched film. The most intriguing aspect of Cukor's handling of the female stereotyping in *The Women* is the subtle undermining of expectations: Norma Shearer's excessive emotional tremulousness becomes arduous and, in contrast, Joan Crawford, at times, reveals an emotional delicacy that disrupts the hard-as-nails image she is supposed to embody. And, as I discuss below, while Cukor is concerned with woman-as-actress/performer, he isn't presenting the notion as a celebratory image in itself.

As I indicated earlier, Cukor's identity as a gay person is a crucial factor when considering his films; and, similarly, that Hitchcock, Hawks and Ford were heterosexual is equally significant to their works. (More recently, Hitchcock's sexual pathology has been given a great deal of emphasis and has been incorporated into readings of his films.²⁸) Unlike a heterosexual male director who can confidently give expression to his sexual identity knowing that the orientation has a public acceptance, Cukor's orientation undoubtedly inhibited at times a direct self-expression; in turn, the initial auteurist critics perceived this as an indication of an insufficient personal involvement on his part. Also, in the late '50s and early '60s, these critics tended to devalue a director who acknowledged his commitment to the studio system and collaboration.²⁹ Directors like Hitchcock, Hawks and Ford were seen as being primarily responsible for the entire project including the production and writing — the

image evoked was both that of the 'Romantic' artist and the self-sufficient male.³⁰ In contrast, Cukor stressed his connection to the studio system and need of collaborators, particularly writers, actors, cameramen, designers; yet, in interviews,³¹ it is also clearly evident that Cukor was technically knowledgeable and highly involved in the pre-production stages of many of his films and a commanding presence on and off the set. Ronald Haver's book *A Star Is Born*³² offers insight into Cukor's enormous intervention in every aspect of the project which was, technically, a Sid Luft-Judy Garland production. There is no reason to assume that Cukor's extensive participation in the conception of *A Star Is Born* was uncharacteristic of his working habits; the interviews, if read closely, and Haver's account of the making of *A Star Is Born* support this assumption.

According to auteurist principles, the auteur, a self-expressive director, produces a body of work that reveals a thematic and/or stylistic consistency. In regard to Cukor's style, Edward Buscombe, in a short piece entitled "On Cukor" (a reference to his review of Gavin Lambert's interview book *On Cukor*) published by *Screen*³³ in the early '70s, articulates what troubled auteurist critics about Cukor's stylistic approach:

a) Cukor's work reveals a 'stylist';
b) through the years, the style is altered. (In Lambert's book, Cukor says of style:

But I really think the style comes out of the story You research the period, not just to reproduce things physically, but for the emotions it stirs up in you I always say the text dictates the whole style to me, which may not be to the director's advantage, because it means his touch is not immediately recognizable.

Look at Truffaut's *Stolen Kisses*. A wonderful picture that never hits you over the head with anything. Unless you really looked very closely, very professionally, you weren't aware how discreet and right the set ups were, they were so unobtrusive.

Buscombe doesn't deal with Cukor as a stylist³⁴ and he questions Lambert's assertion that a Cukor style can be detected at the conclusion of his article, which contests Lambert's claim that Cukor is ". . . the inventor of his films" Buscombe says, "Lambert rightly picks out long takes as a feature of Cukor's style. But equally long takes

exist in Capra films, and others." Buscombe's point is that Cukor, Capra and others share a cinematic code which, in turn, relates to other cinematic and non-cinematic codes. While Buscombe's response to Lambert's contention is well-taken, he doesn't invalidate the fact that an aspect of Cukor's style is employing long takes — Cukor, Capra and other directors don't necessarily employ the long take in the exact same manner or achieve similar results through its usage.

On the other hand, the question of Cukor and style isn't simply a matter of the long takes he consistently used throughout his career. Auteurism lauds the self-expressive director but, curiously, is troubled by an artist who is willing to test or extend his or her creative capabilities. Cukor's most striking stylistic changes — the late '40s and early '50s films shot on location and with a more grainy film stock to approximate a greater 'realism'; in the mid-'50s, the experiments with the Cinemascope format from *A Star Is Born* onward; the interest in the aesthetics of and emotional impact of colour — occurred in conjunction with shifts within the film industry, technological advancements and, also, reflect an interaction between Cukor and his immediate technical and artistic collaborators. (*A Star Is Born* initiated a long-term working relationship between Cukor, Gene Allen, an art director, and George Hoyningen-Huene, a creative consultant. While these factors need to be considered, so does, and more importantly, the fact that Cukor was open to artistic challenges that would enrich his work. And, the films are, ultimately, because of their women-centred concerns and the consistent sensitivity to the visualization and dramatization of the material, Cukor's films. Working in a visual medium, it is ironic that Cukor, like Vincente Minnelli, has been considered a lesser talent because of his identity as a stylist.

In the films of directors such as Hitchcock and Ford, theme and style are tightly integrated but with a director like Hawks or Leo McCarey, it is the thematic that most strongly gives the works their consistency. (Hawks and McCarey employ a style that can best be described as 'democratic' i.e., frequent two-shots, *plan américain* framing, etc. These directors are stylistically consistent in that this unobtrusive presentation of the thematic is never deviated from.) Hawks and McCarey are auteurs primarily on the basis of their thematic whereas Cukor's thematic also seemed



A Star Is Born: CinemaScope and Technicolor

to be undefinable. In the '50s and early '60s, auteur critics sought to find a thematic in a director's work which was suitably serious-minded and befitting the ruminations of a male artist (and critic, if he was to feel that the artist justified his respect and admiration.) Although it was evident that Cukor's films were often centred on women, he was, after all, a 'woman's director,' the possibility that Cukor's thematic was women's images was never given a real consideration. (Perhaps, if Cukor's films had a masculinist perspective and concentrated on woman-as-unknowable or woman-as-duplicious, the films would have been read as making a 'statement' and, therefore, worthy of a male critic's recognition.) Feminism has changed perceptions and, in the present-day, it doesn't seem inappropriate to accord a thematic status to the depiction of women's social and sexual identities. Although Cukor's films taken together offer a diverse group of female protagonists, the films are consistent in various ways: 1) almost invariably the woman possesses intelligence, creativity, deter-

mination, integrity; 2) because of her individual sensibility, the woman is often a social misfit and seeks an alternative person or group to relate to and find acceptance, e.g., *The Actress*, *Bhowani Junction*, *Heller in Pink Tights*, etc.; 3) in numerous films, the woman is either attracted to or involved with a man who is essentially sympathetic to her position because he is, like her, vulnerable, e.g., *A Life of Her Own*, *A Star Is Born*, etc.. Cukor's films are very much concerned with heterosexual relations and the sex-gender issues involved, and he seems drawn to material that lacks the conventional hero figure who resolves all the heroine's problems e.g., *Camille*, *A Life of Her Own*, *A Star Is Born*, etc. In some instances, e.g., *A Woman's Face*, *Bhowani Junction*, *The Chapman Report*, there is a conventional hero figure but the films display a minimal interest in these males who are perfunctory characters. Importantly, the films don't usually employ a hero (or heroine) who successfully neutralizes or eradicates the sex-gender division. Although sex-gender tensions are per-

sonalized in the films, they are also placed within a broader context, the cultural, the social, the economic, and beyond the control of a single individual.

While Cukor's female characters have certain traits that are traditionally associated with the masculine, e.g., self-assertion, honesty, etc., he doesn't masculinize the woman or, alternatively, make her into a 'man's woman,' i.e., the Hawksian woman who can be accommodated into a masculine universe. (Similarly, the male isn't feminized. Cukor's men aren't, as Carlos Clarens claims in a quotation given earlier, 'inobtrusive'; instead, they are usually less than committed to projecting a masculine male image and sensibility.) In numerous films, the woman's sensuality and sexual allure is prominently evident e.g., *Two-Faced Woman*, *Bhowani Junction*, *Heller in Pink Tights*, etc., but as Ian Jarvie has pointed out,³⁶ Cukor doesn't have his actresses photographed in a way that reduces their physicality to a spectacle for the male viewer's gaze; rather, the sexuality and

eroticism they embody is linked to an expression of their total personas which includes but isn't centred on being a sexual presence. In such films as *Bhowani Junction* and *Heller in Pink Tights* the sensual isn't confined to bodily presence of the woman — the mise-en-scène, i.e., colour, fabric textures, lighting, is employed to enhance a sense of the tactile and seductive. Also, when a female character in a Cukor film conveys sexual desire she does so because she desires — the male becomes, in effect, the object of this desire, e.g., Garbo's first sight of Robert Taylor in *Camille*, Jacqueline Bisset's picking up Matt Latanzi in *Rich and Famous*, etc.

Acting and performance aren't gender specific in Cukor's films — *A Double Life*, *A Star Is Born*, *Les Girls* are among the films that contain a male protagonist who is a professional actor or performing artist. But acting takes on a particular significance in Cukor's work in relation to his female characters, in part because there are so many films which feature a woman as a professional actress and also because women have been traditionally associated with role playing. (In addition to the recurrent image of the professional actress, there are several important films, notably, *Camille* and *Two-Faced Woman*, in which the woman stages a performance in the context of a personal relationship.) Most often, the woman is an actress/performer because the profession offers her an acceptable means to express her creativity, vitality and enthusiasm for life; in this sense, the profession carries a positive connotation providing an outlet for both a potential professional and personal growth. Significantly, in Cukor's films the concept of woman-actress-performance isn't essentially presented, as it often is, in a manner that serves as a critical tool in which the identity of woman-as-actress is conceived in the terms of a negative trajectory. Again, it isn't that Cukor's films are devoid of a critical awareness of women's positioning in a social structure that is male dominated; on the other hand, the films usually portray the woman-as-actress as having personal resources which prevent her from becoming an emblem of women's oppression or self-oppression. For instance, there is no Cukor actress-centred film which is as insistently a meditation on the notion of woman-as-spectacle as Ophüls' *Lola Montes*. Although *Heller in Pink Tights* explicitly raises this issue, the Sophia Loren character eventually realizes that her personal loss outweighs what she gains by

exploiting herself as a spectacle. And, unlike such Sternberg-Dietrich films as *Blonde Venus* and *The Devil Is a Woman*, performance in Cukor's films isn't primarily related to either the woman acting out the various roles offered to her within patriarchy or using acting as a self-protective survival tactic as occurs in the latter Sternberg film. Also, in the Sternberg-Dietrich films, Dietrich's involvement with men is to a degree predicated on survival whereas in Cukor's films the woman's involvement in heterosexual relations entails an emotional commitment and genuine desire.

Furthermore, as for women and role playing, the Cukor films do not characterize the professional actress as a person who, because she lacks an identity, is constantly giving a performance in her personal relations, as does the Lana Turner character in Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life*; or, unlike Sirk with *All I Desire*, Cukor, unless the material imposes the opposition, i.e., *The Women*, avoids splitting a woman's options into a career versus domestic dichotomy. And, from another perspective, Cukor eschews the theatrical tradition that aligns the professional actress and performance to a metaphorical statement about art transcending life i.e., Renoir's *The Golden Coach*. In this

regard, it is interesting to compare Judy Garland's response to personal tragedy in the conclusion of *A Star Is Born* with that of Liza Minnelli in Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*. In Cukor's film, for Garland the professional becomes a means of declaring the pain of personal loss ('Hello, everybody, this is Mrs. Norman Maine') whereas for Minnelli the professional becomes a retreat from the personal and an insulation against pain. In its conclusion, *Heller in Pink Tights*, which is, in many ways, a companion piece to *A Star Is Born*, has the heterosexual couple reunited on stage but within a context that is intimate and personal.

To return to the question of why feminist critics haven't shown a strong interest in Cukor's work, the answer seems to involve his personality as it is revealed through the films. Cukor isn't a forceful director when compared to a Hitchcock or the Sternberg of the Dietrich films. In addition to creative powers, these directors are obsessive in their delineation of their thematic and have produced films which demand recognition and a response; in different ways, they have given feminist critics a challenge which must be met. In contrast, Cukor's films aren't aggressive works but this doesn't mean that he is either



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lacking in artistry or in insight into women's identities and heterosexual relations. Whether or not Cukor is accorded auteur status isn't really a relevant concern to my project; I am not primarily writing on Cukor to produce a traditional auteurist argument. I do think his work deserves greater recognition than it has been given; but, essentially, Cukor's films are valuable on a multitude of levels that don't necessarily demand an auteurist validation. The films often embody an extraordinary energy and sensitivity to the complexities of survival in what is an extremely crude and barbaric social and economic system; the films are important because they probe into the heart of this dilemma which is constructed on sexual inequality. In Cukor's films, sex and gender issues are dealt with in a way that is distinctive and separates the films from the works of other directors working in the mainstream cinema (and, clearly, from the works that are being produced within the feminist movement) during a specific historical period. In considering Cukor in relation to his peers, it becomes evident that he holds a somewhat different position. On the one hand, Cukor's films aren't fully attuned to the American 'democratic' tradition of Hawks, Capra, McCarey and Ford. Among other things, the tradition which to a degree includes Hitchcock is male oriented and defined; on the other, Cukor doesn't belong, although there is a European flavour to his work in its sophistication, to the European current within the Hollywood cinema that is represented by such directors as Lang, Sirk and Wilder. These directors are often fairly explicit (and cynical and/or pessimistic) about the political implications of their material. Cukor's films aren't underpinned with an overt political intention; nevertheless, the films have an implicitly strong political dimension for both feminist and gay criticism.

This is the first installment of a 2-part article.

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (Great Britain: Fontana/Collins, 1977), pp. 142-148.
2. Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).
3. Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much* (New York & London: Methuen, 1988).
4. Robin Wood, "Fear of Spying," *American Film* (November 1982): 28-35. The article is reprinted in Wood's *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
5. John Caughie, *Theories of Authorship* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).
6. Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: Secker and Warburg in association with the British Film Institute, 1969).
7. Christopher Faulkner, *The Social Cinema of Jean Renoir* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986).
8. Peter Brunette, *Roberto Rossellini* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
9. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
10. For example, see Sarris, Andrew, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1968) pp. 88-90.
11. Auteurism didn't change Cukor's ideas about film and filmmaking. See Koszarski, Richard, *Hollywood Directors 1914-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) pp. 322-331. Koszarski's book contains an article entitled "The Director" written by Cukor and reprinted from Watts, Stephen (ed.), *Behind the Screen* (New York: 1938) in which he describes his working procedures. Cukor's orientation in the article and in the interviews given after the introduction of auteurism is consistent. For example, see the interview with George Cukor by Higham, Charles and Joel Greenberg, *The Celluloid Muse: Hollywood Directors Speak* (New York: Signet, New American Library, 1969) p. 62.
12. For example, see Hachem, Samir, "Inside the Tinselled Closet," *The Advocate*, March 17, 1987, pp. 42-49.
13. Andrew Holleran, "New York Notebook: Rock's Life," *Christopher Street*, December 1989, pp. 4-19.
14. Hadleigh, Boze, *Conversation With My Elders* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).
15. Recently, soon after Malcolm Forbes died, it was revealed in print that he was gay. The revelation has initiated a controversial issue which has been labelled 'outing' — that is, the naming of gays who prefer, for one reason or another, to remain in the closet. For a discussion on outing and the reasoning behind the practice see Goldstein, Richard, "The Art of Outing," *The Village Voice*, May 1, 1990.
16. Schickel, Richard, *The Men Who Made the Movies* (New York: Atheneum, 1975) pp. 163-166.
17. Cukor's position as 'outsider' was compounded by his being a Jew; although he tended to avoid discussing Anti-semitism in Hollywood, he mentions in Hadleigh's book that Harry Cohn, himself a Jew, was a bigot calling Judy Holliday "a fat Jewish broad." Hadleigh, *My Elders*, op. cit., pp. 152.
18. Britton, Andrew, *Katharine Hepburn: The Thirties and After* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Tyneside Cinema, 1984).
19. Hadleigh, op. cit., p. 154.
20. Cukor's reputation as 'woman's director' was firmly established by 1937. See David O. Selznick's memo to Ronald Coleman on Cukor's skillful direction of actresses in *Memo From David O. Selznick*, selected and edited by Rudy Behlmer (New York: Avon Books, 1973) p. 153.
21. Naremore, James, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
22. Phillips, Gene D., (Warren French, ed.) *George Cukor* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982) p. 101.
23. Although the film script was primarily written by Anita Loos and Jane Murnin, seven other writers, including Donald Ogden Stewart and F. Scott Fitzgerald, were involved with the project at various stages of its conception. *Ibid* p. 103.
24. Lambert, Gavin, *On Cukor* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972) pp. 136-140.
25. Clarens, Carlos, "The Secret Life of George Cukor," interviewed by Hofsess, John, *Stallion*, August 1983, p. 32.
26. Clarens, Carlos, *Cukor* (London: Secker and Warburg in association with the British Film Institute, 1976).
27. For example, see Penley, Constance, "Cries and Whispers," *Movies and Methods*, Bill Nichols, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) pp. 204-208.
28. For example, see Spoto, Donald, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984).
29. As originally practiced, auteurism was almost exclusively male dominated. Not surprisingly, the criticism reflected a masculinist sensibility and value system.
30. It is difficult to find precise information on Cukor's contractual arrangements with the various studios. From the mid '30s to the early '50s, he was under contract to MGM; the studio frequently allowed him to make films off the lot. In general, Cukor seems to have had a say in what films he would do but, unlike such directors as Hitchcock, Hawks, Ford and Otto Preminger, Cukor never produced a film or formed a production company that would offer projects to a studio. For a reference to Cukor and his MGM contract, see Estrin, Allen, *The Hollywood Professionals, Vol. 6* (Capra, Cukor, Brown) (South Brunswick and New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, London: The Tantivy Press, 1980) pp. 110, 104.
31. For example, see "Interview with George Cukor," interviewed by Overstreet, Richard, *Film Culture*, No. 34, Fall, 1964, pp. 1-16.
32. Haver, Ronald, *A Star Is Born: The Making of the 1954 Movie and Its 1983 Restoration* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1988) (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Perennial Library, 1990).
33. Buscombe, Edward, "On Cukor," *Screen 14*, Autumn, 1973, pp. 101-106.
34. Buscombe says that the Anglo-American critical tradition hasn't developed the tools to deal with a filmmaker who is a stylist. This is still very much so. Buscombe takes a structural approach to Cukor's work suggesting that the films repeatedly feature central characters who are performers and confront a split between their public and private lives. Buscombe, "On Cukor," op. cit., pp. 103-106.
35. Overstreet, "Interview," op. cit., p. 11.
36. Ian Jarvie provided this observation in a discussion of the project.



What Does a Man Know

by Florence Jacobowitz

About

Mother Love?

Blonde Venus

The contemptuous dismissals of Sternberg's *Blonde Venus* by conservative male critics like John Grierson and the British documentarists, Rudolf Arnheim in the '30s, and John Baxter, Charles Silver¹ et al. in the '70s, have been replaced by more recent 'politicized' readings which find new grounds for rejection. Interestingly, all schools root their malice in Sternberg. The earlier critics tend to condemn Sternberg's emphasis on high stylization which supersedes narrative probability, while feminist leaning critics concur that Dietrich is turned into a supreme fetish in *Blonde Venus* — one which works both to repress and deny the threat of female sexuality and to subjugate the woman to the demands of the spectacle and the overbearing, entrapping aesthetic play. This latter interpretation, frequently reiterated in a variety of forms, denies a number of central and disturbing features of the film, most significantly, the film's challenge to prevalent consensual notions of motherhood, the nuclear family, and female sexuality. If this apparent overt fetishization is directed towards the masking of difference and the denial of female autonomy, why is the film so intently concerned with exploring the woman's rejection of patriarchal reproduction and control, in a variety of its manifestations?

Blonde Venus and the Melodrama

Of all the Sternberg/Dietrich collaborations, *Blonde Venus* most closely follows the generic demands of the melodrama and its subdivision, the woman's film, popularized during the '30s. The film, like the genre, gains its resonance and fascination through the investigation of the ambivalence and frustration surrounding dominant values, an articulation which finds no other social form of expression. The melodrama provides its traditional function of naming and giving voice to illegitimate contestations of dominant norms. The woman's film directs the polemic towards the woman's position, and to the neglected realm of women's needs and fantasies. At its best, the woman's film, like the cream of women's novels, provided a space for the dramatisation of the underside of gender laws and often dared to present illegal, censored scenarios: What happens when a mother desires the child but rejects the family? What happens to the mother's sexual identity? What happens when the woman rejects her subordination and ghettoised placement within the dismal domestic sphere? Dare one ask? Cultural forms often dramatise the woman's instigation of a crisis resulting from her unwillingness to be satisfied by one man's love and its reward to follow: marriage. Few films, to this day, boldly place *the mother* within this position. A masculine-dominant society is very uncomfortable with variations on the theme of motherhood and finds it particularly abhorrent and threatening to consider the mother as a sexual being or as an autonomous individual. Outside of the safety of home and family, the woman as mother loses all meaning. It is the apocalyptic energy which fuels the likes of Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary or Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*. In most of these forms, the lover acts as a catalyst to spark the protagonist's desire for freedom and activity. *Blonde Venus* is difficult to classify because Helen Faraday/Dietrich and her son are content to be together, without the guise of the adult father/lover, thus defying both the bedrock of the nuclear family and heterosexual romance. The protagonist's sexuality is never directed, finally, towards any adult male in particular. The mother/son relationship denies the father/lover a place, and in so doing, denies patriarchy a place.

Blonde Venus takes up many of the genre's classic concerns and manifestations. The domestic space is imaged as a confining, dreary, claustrophobic prison. Illness acts as a metaphor for the frustrations which turn inward. In *Blonde Venus* this theme is brilliantly inverted and attributed to the husband, Ned Faraday/Herbert Marshall. His inability to control and secure his wife places him in a feminised position. As is characteristic of the genre, he never gains the rootness privileged to the audience. The film also evidence its roots in the earlier traditions of the genre: its characters and situations are often emblematic as opposed to being psychologically individuated. The mise-en-scène is overstated, hyperbolic and compressed and corresponds to emotional states and repressed desires. The articulation of struggle is clearly divided, not merely along the lines of gender but according to empowerment. Helen is persecuted by a variety of males who attempt to control and define her identity and destiny, but she is also entrapped by a social system which disenfranchises women (both gay and heterosexual) blacks and the poor. The film's placement within contemporary depression America (as opposed to the exotic locales one finds in the other American Sternberg/Dietrich films) underlines the metaphoric links between fictional representation and social reality, however, the stylised over-pronounced dramatisation problematises expectations of identification and authenticity. What is strik-

ing about *Blonde Venus* is that however much direct psychological identification is confounded, the film's orientation and allegiances are unmistakably directed towards the needs and desires of women like the protagonist.

The film is well aware of the modes of exploitation and subordination inherent in gender relations and sets these up from the start. The opening of *Blonde Venus*, cut for many years from circulating prints and only recently reintegrated, is a critical prelude to the melodrama to follow. It realises a space outside of the domestic and the familial (more symbolic than actual) which equates female autonomy, play, fun and pleasure with a homosocial environment, and introduces the uninvited intrusion of male culture into that world. The opening aligns the protagonist's pleasure with her career (the theatre) and with a romanticized, nostalgic image of Europe which makes the scenes that follow in the New York tenement-like apartment seem even more oppressive, bleak and alienating. The idyllic opening problematises the narrative's reimposition of circularity and order: Helen's identity did not begin at home and raises the question of whether that is where it deserves to be laid to rest. It makes Sternberg's original hopes for the end (rumoured to have been at the Paris-nightclub sequence) somewhat more logical in that Helen's trajectory takes her back to the theatre and back to Europe. The opening also sets up the locus classicus of romantic courtship. The male is attracted to and desiring of the sexual being — not the hausfrau. Securing his possession through courtship and marriage transforms and frustrates forever his desire for the sexual woman. The nude bather splashing in the sun-dappled pond starkly contrasts with the confining and harsh maid-like costume Helen wears at home. The only other moment where Ned is as desiring of Helen is when he views her back home, but transformed and estranged via her sensual costume and engagement to Nick. Marriage and motherhood, therefore, create and construct a number of conflicting, contradictory desires for the male as well as the female. The opening presents an unrealisable fantasy for both Helen and Ned; for Helen it recalls a moment of self-contained independence (as she later admits, "I was thinking of going back to the theatre anyway") while for Ned it romanticizes the virile ritual of courtship (securing the object of desire for marriage and reproduction). The wife, once secured as mother, must be sexually defused and barred from autonomous interaction in the social world where she may a) be seen and desired b) establish an identity distinct from her reproductive function. Upon achieving this sequestration, the husband's desire undergoes a transition (related, in part to the housewife's loss of her sexual identity). He must fulfill his duties as provider and sublimates his desire into desexualized appreciation for the woman's abilities to be a dutiful respectable wife and mother. (There is, significantly, no indication of a marital bedroom in the apartment — the focus is concentrated on Johnny.) The woman must be wholly convinced that the 'awards' of marriage (domestic security, the child etc.) outweigh her needs for autonomous self-expression and fulfillment in anything outside of the domestic.

The opening sequences introduce the theme of male sexual desire and speculation that will be taken up a number of times throughout the film. (It is a theme which recurs in many of the Sternberg/Dietrich films: one need only think of Peter's sexual voyeurism — encapsulated in the drill piercing the eye of the portrait — in *The Scarlet Empress*.) The perspective offered, from the beginning, is detached and commentative, and is *not* aligned simply with the masculine position. The opening shots dramatise a trajectory which will be

repeated: masculine pleasure is aroused through the act of spectating and voyeurism in relation to female performance (sanctioned through the theatre or unsanctioned, as in the forest pool.) The male uses his empowered position to bargain for a concession or exchange, initially in the form of satisfying his sexual desire but later as a means of ascertaining ownership. Ned only will agree to leave and respect the women's demands for privacy if Helen promises to meet him after the show, thus temporarily delaying gratification. The sexual encounter leads to marriage and Johnny (in whatever order). Nick Townsend/Cary Grant, similarly, goes backstage, twice, for the same purpose: the sexual exchange is followed by possession. In the first instance Nick decides that "O'Connor's isn't a fit place for you to be seen in night after night" (though during the Hot Voodoo number, there is a pronounced close up shot of Nick "looking" and assessing her body) and the visit in Paris results in an engagement. It is significant that none of these sequences dramatises the end of the pursuit/exchange. Helen's refusal to agree to Ned's conditions is met by Ned's insistent condescending proclamation "Alright my little water nymph, we'll stay"; Helen then slaps the water angrily and swims away in frustration. The significance of Nick Townsend's night with Helen is distilled in the moment he signs the cheque. The scenes never isolate love or romance — instead, they inform the viewer of a set of gender relations, structured on the laws of exchange and acquisition,

underlying the façade of desire and courtship.

This illustration reminds us of the potentially subversive power of the genre: it dramatises a set of cultural values within a wider scope of economic and social relations, and it also, often, presents a quasi-detached perspective which is not aligned with the protagonist. The opening shots illustrate the conflicting desires of the gender groups. The film opens with a shot of a woman swimming across the water on a diagonal and is followed by an establishing shot, taken from a distance behind the foliage, of the women swimming. I am not convinced that this shot merely reproduces the masculine spectating position of voyeur as much as it places the women as a group within their surroundings and, as noted earlier, acts as a strong contrast to the narrative that follows. It is the only scene where women are presented as a group; Helen is later isolated and separated from women and only meets with isolated incidences of female solidarity. It is also significant that, unlike a similar shot later on taken from a closer position of the male group looking, where the women's bodies are more exposed, initially the women are obscured, and only their voices, attesting to their pleasure and fun, can be heard. The camera then tracks the group of men, and underlines one of the men's opening lines of dialogue "Just cover me with leaves and tell my mother I died with her name on my lips," introducing the theme of mother/son bonding to follow by having the moment end in a wipe, suggesting a break or



The Blonde Venus: Hot Voodoo

caesura, then resumes the track to the point where they meet up with the women's cab driver. The interlude acts as a humorous and ironic commentary, distancing the audience from the tourists in Germany and from the American point-of-view. The driver's adamant refusal to converse or engage with the men is interpreted as a strategy to up his price; one of the group comments "Ah, he just wants to bargain," and another adds, "Come on, we'll pay you well, we're Americans." This final conquering proclamation is met with the driver's persistent lack of interest: "Ausgeschlossen — ich bin ein ehrlicher Mensch . . ." (Out of the question, I'm an honest man) and ends with him spitting on the ground. The ironic presentation invites the viewer to remain critically aware. The opening scenes are elliptical and concise, and serve to introduce and relate a number of important themes: romantic courtship and gender difference, emigration and cultural difference and the child's uninterrupted affinity with the woman/mother, instantly expressed in the stunning dissolve from the women's legs in the water to Johnny's in the bathtub. It is significant that the bond is expressed through play and the pleasurable sensuality and sense of freedom associated with the swimmers in the earlier shots. Sternberg establishes this connection first, and then inserts the shot of an ocean liner arriving in the New York harbour, before resuming the scene in the bathtub. The scene of Helen bathing her son concludes, yet again, with the theme of the father's intrusion, as she says "Sit up Johnny, you know I've no time to play — Father will be back soon" and ends with a punctuating wipe. With very little exposition the film informs the viewer that the courtship in Germany has resulted in a marriage, a child and a move to America, with little evidence of celebration.

The resumption of the narrative introduces a practical crisis: Ned's illness. His attempt to sell his body to science and his desperate need for money are attributed to his marriage, as he tells the doctor, "I wouldn't come here if I weren't [married]" and the burden of responsibility which being the head of a family imposes. As Robin Wood notes in "Venus de Marlene" (*Film Comment*, Vol. 14, No. 2 March-April 1978, pp. 60-61), the scene in the doctor's office, structured around the skeletal skull lying on the doctor's desk, between the two men, suggests that "the father is already dead." Thus, Ned's illness also suggests a symbolic crisis: the father has failed in a variety of ways. He is a commercial chemist hoping to invent a means whereby radium can be used without danger and he has clearly failed miserably in the sense that he is dying of this poisoning. In addition, he has not only failed to secure a means of economic survival for his family (to which the apartment visually attests) but cannot raise nearly enough to finance his potential cure. Ned's workplace is at home which further aligns him with a feminised, castrated position (associated with enfeeblement and illness). Helen's proclamation to return to work and her admitting that it is both related to her desire to help earn the money Ned can't provide, and to a desire that she's wanted to fulfill for awhile — her return to her old work, the stage — encapsulates Ned's failure. His attempt at assertion, "It is out of the question," is ignored entirely. The father's impending death confirms his inutility, and the narrative will indicate that not only can the family survive without him, but his wife is directly responsible for saving his life. She must intrude on his position and her desire to return to work indicates her dissatisfaction with the meagre compensation received for her commitment to love and to renouncing her previous identity — i.e. their marriage. Although Ned's illness instigates the obvious crisis in the narrative, the mise-en-scène and casting of Dietrich

visually tells us that the crisis has been precipitated through the re-establishment of Helen/Dietrich as Mrs. Faraday. The casting of Dietrich as mother/wife immediately suggests a conflict/contradiction: it is difficult to de-eroticize this star and the attempt to de-glamourize her via the pulled-back hair, the overly-stated black/white servant-like costume and her placement behind a needlepoint, emphasizes the incompatibility. Dietrich's acting style (her comments and announcements are stated away from Ned, as if she can't look him in the eye and honestly argue that her desire to work is motivated solely by his illness) dissociates her from a sense of a relationship. She admits, turned away, "I was thinking of it anyway." This is further reinforced when Ned protests that in a few weeks his formula will be finished and Helen just looks away. The dissolve to a close-up shot of a variety of women's legs tap-dancing announces Helen's victory and the affirmation of a crisis: Helen's consent to love, marry and obey dissolves along with the shot and instead, the rejection of her claustration is announced. And although the film does not suggest that the workplace is less exploitive, male-dominated and controlled, it is still preferable to what Helen leaves behind.

The narrative carefully notes that Helen's enthusiasm and desire to return to work never suggests a wish to leave Johnny. She leaves careful instructions regarding his care and packs his picture and Ned's, though Johnny's is most prominent in later shots on her dressing-room table. She is also most appreciative of Johnny's support of her decision, expressed through the donation of his bear (for luck) and his kisses. Ned never wishes her well and can only add "I hate to see you do this." The shot prior to the one of Nick signing the cheque has him pick up Johnny's photograph and comment "He sure looks a lot like you." The moment links Helen's motivations to Johnny as much as it does to either Ned (the 'favour' is exchanged for boat-fare) or Nick (the Hot-Voodoo inspired release of sexual desire).

Blonde Venus starts to present the promise of an ideal nuclear family (as encapsulated in the bed-time story: handsome scientist meets beautiful actress, and secures her as wife and mother) and proceeds to dramatise a suppressed cultural fantasy: the family, reiterated as the mother-child relationship, continues without the father. Again, the casting of Dietrich is critical to the way the film retranscribes the genre. One is never given a sense of Helen's helplessness or of her floundering; there is no terrible sacrifice or heavily burdened conscience. Within a relatively short introduction, the gravity of the narrative disturbance — Helen's renunciation of the rules of the various transactions which inform gender relations — is accentuated and deepened by the star's interpretation of the character, played without any expression of guilt, anxiety, regret or cognizance of transgression. Dietrich does not dramatise sacrifice and denial in the way that Stanwyck does in *Stella Dallas* or Crawford in *Mildred Pierce*. In fact the heart of the film, Helen and Johnny's flight from patriarchal law, directly challenges any assent on her part that she is 'fallen' or an inadequate mother. Even the moment when Helen gives up the child, explaining in an unmistakably mocking sardonic tone, "I'm no good, no good at all you see," is heavily ironic, echoing Ned's proclamation "You've been a rotten mother to him" which is emblematic of legally-sanctioned male authority. The decision to separate from Johnny, expresses Helen's inability to continue fleeing this law under impoverished conditions, but never suggests that she believes or supports this verdict.

What Helen/Dietrich will maintain throughout each movement of the film is an awareness of the roles and com-

promises inherent in a world where men are empowered, and a simultaneous sense of survival within that world. This survival is, at once, highly transgressive and compromised. Helen challenges the system in which she moves, but doesn't succeed in destroying it. The film articulates individual protest but asserts the realization that the roots of the dilemma exceed the power of one insolent protagonist.

I wish to isolate four major movements in the film, each structured upon the question of a woman's self assertion and methods of survival. The first movement, already discussed, places the problematic within the trajectory of courtship and marriage (i.e. domestication) resulting in Helen's rejection of her role as wife, expressed through her choice to resume her stage career. The next movement outlines a woman's alternatives: the return to the workplace, still defined by men, the affair with the lover, Nick Townsend (visualized as another form of entrapment, however luxurious) and the dissolution of both the marriage and the affair (initiated upon Ned's return). The third movement, the heart of the film, chronicles Helen's flight from the law with her child, outlining her increasing impoverishment. The movement culminates in Helen's decision to give Johnny up and ends with her visit to the flop house and her subsequent defiant rejection of defeat. The last movement of the film follows Helen's re-emergence in Paris and her reunion with Johnny.²

Commodity and Exchange

Like Sternberg's last two films with Dietrich, *The Scarlet Empress* and *The Devil Is A Woman*, *Blonde Venus* places the themes of the woman's picture (the crisis resulting from Helen's multiple transgressions: her return to work, her affair, her unwillingness to accept the judgement that she is a 'bad' mother, her independence, etc.) within a precise system which commodifies and exploits all facets of human relationships. This frame of reference is rooted in the fundamentals of the melodrama. Every step Helen takes, emblematic of a woman's choices (or the lack of these), is circumscribed by forms of trade, exchange and ownership. As noted earlier, the film aligns all the characters along a scale of empowerment which extends beyond divisions of gender. Ned, however slightly ahead of Helen and the Afro-Americans in the film, because he is white and male, is behind Nick who is wealthy ("has plenty of 'Jack'"), and controls part or most of the town, etc. Everything and everyone has a price. Ned's life is practically worthless (his attempt to sell his body for research is rejected) and Helen's body and abilities (judged by 'what she's got') are worth a negotiable amount. The film clearly implies that agents and club owners like Smith and O'Connor expect a sexual exchange for their services. Smith demands to see Helen's legs and his response to her lifting her skirt to her thighs and her asking if "that's enough" is answered with "For the time being . . . You certainly got me hopped up." Taxi-Belle "Do-you-charge-for-the-first-mile" Hooper's claim that "O'Connor'd jump all over me if it weren't for Townsend" is substantiated by the familiar kiss he gives her when she enters the dressing-room. Nick can buy and pay for 'favours': he gives Taxi-Belle a bracelet and first gives Helen flowers (displacing her husband who no longer needs or can afford to court her), then a cheque for \$300, a puppy for Johnny, luxurious clothing and accommodations, a nanny and a vacation (replete with motorboat and riding gear) in exchange for Helen's acceptance of the role of mistress. He later uses a fare back to America and an offer to buy time to see Johnny to gain Helen's assent to an engagement.

The dissolution of Helen's marriage to Ned results in the loss of the exchange implied by marriage: her legal status and rights as mother/caregiver. Her rejection of the affair, as a sacrifice to Ned who is weaker and needier than Nick, denies her the shelter and luxuries life with Nick has afforded. As a result, Helen is involved in more overt forms of exchange or prostitution. She must sell herself, her sexuality, and her body. This is evidenced in the scene where Helen offers to go back to the kitchen and 'wash dishes' for the lecherous restaurant owner in exchange for a meal, or by her criminal charge of 'vagrancy' or in the scene with detective Wilson down south who picks her up for her services as a prostitute. Helen's strength and ability to compete on the terms set out by society ensure her survival. She is aware of the rules and her adeptness at counter-exploitation allows her to gain economic freedom.³ Men in the film describe the way she has gained notoriety by "using men as stepping stones" or taking them "like Grant took Richmond." This defiant awareness and unwillingness to be destroyed by the law she contravenes (which only sanctions forms of exploitation which service white middle-class men) empowers her. As noted, this is epitomized and reinforced by Dietrich's star persona and performance style and includes details like the hands on the hips stance and swagger, (which works against the male titillating mise-en-scène of the Hot Voodoo number), the recitation of dialogue directed to no male in particular, the knowing intelligence and, most importantly, the unhesitating rejection of the most sacredly-held conventions of a society which privileges men over women, whites over all others, heterosexuals over gays and bisexuals etc. This tension underlies all of the Sternberg/Dietrich collaborations. Masculine desire leads to exploitation and Dietrich either quickly learns or already knows the rules and plays accordingly. Not surprisingly, she is often the prostitute/courtesan and uses the system to empower herself (variations of this appear in her role as the courtesan/spy in *Dishonoured*, the mysterious showgirl on a boat to nowhere in *Morocco*, the prostitute in *Shanghai Express*, in Catherine's education in the Russian court in *The Scarlet Empress*, climaxing in her takeover of the entire army, or in Concha's refined, practised art of bartering for desire in *The Devil Is A Woman*). Despite the characters' complicity in the forms of buy and sell, they remain defiant to the end. The permutations in the films vary, but two shining examples might be X27's lipstick ritual preceding her execution in *Dishonoured*, which, in a gesture, belittles and demeans all the codes and protocol revered by a masculine world, or the transitional moment at the end of *The Devil Is A Woman*, after Concha sends her surprised, dashing young lover off alone and contemplates her past and future over the drags of a cigarette. One of the striking moments in *Blonde Venus* which matches these, is Helen's rejection of Ned's hard-earned repayment of \$1,500. Her mocking quotation of his dramatic gesture, and its newfound use in the flophouse (as a means of helping out another depressed in-mate who threatens suicide because she 'hasn't got a cent') succinctly undermines the rules and significance of the entire social system within which the narrative operates. Helen may have to participate in it to live, but she never endorses it, and the bitter irony of her awareness is expressed in the cynical way she quotes Ned: "It represents my life work, had I been able to exploit it properly I could have made a fortune." *Blonde Venus* also points out, very directly, that the woman's protest transgression and rejection of the place and roles afforded her, will lead to her impoverishment. This is what finally defeats Helen, in the sense that it necessitates returning Johnny to his father.

Mother Love

As outlined earlier, the heart of the film and the drama is centred upon the flight of Helen and Johnny; Helen's rejection of her husband's terms of morality, marriage and motherhood, result in her designated criminal status and subsequent journey into poverty. This trajectory should not be misconstrued as Helen's descent into dirt and destruction on moral terms but on economic ones. In fact, the film suggests, through a number of scenes, that outside of financial hardship, Helen and Johnny are content to be together.

Helen's 'success' as a mother, in the terms society sets out, has been clearly demonstrated, by this point: her devotion to the child and concern for his well-being and safety are only questioned by her husband and the male judicial system which she challenges. The narrative counters this judgement by presenting Johnny's commitment to Helen, evidenced prominently in his reluctance to leave her behind at the train station and return home with his father without her. The film also aligns the condemnation of Helen's behaviour with a masculine empowered response and the support of her flight with a feminine disempowered one. The moments which isolate the latter are significantly attributed to both gay and black women. The lesbian, (who manifests every '30s code of lesbianism: the cropped hair, the lack of make-up, the tailored suit, the 'tough' straight talk and the semblance of being in charge of the nightclub) informs Helen that a man who doesn't like her very much has been asking about her, and advises her not to try to get a job and to keep away from cabarets, empathetically adding, "I've got a kid of my own" before wishing Helen good luck. (One might compare this role model to the persona Helen takes on in Paris.) She also receives help and support from caregivers like the black women Viola, and Cora in the south. Like the gay woman, Cora informs Helen of the presence of the detective, the "white man" who is "snooping" and goes out to investigate further, and abides by Helen's wishes not to allow anyone near Johnny.⁴ The film intentionally designates women, blacks, lesbians and the poor as outsiders within a white male bourgeois heterosexual world.

Although this distinction is made, the portrayal of blacks in the film is complex and contradictory, and fluctuates between the more stereotypical image of the bobbing band-leader in the Hot Voodoo number to the ambivalent yet empathetic portrait of the stuttering bartender who has a conversation with Taxi-Belle regarding the authenticity of the gorilla. In a film that can be extraordinarily elliptical, the interchange is significant. Taxi's attention and serious response undercuts any insinuation that the man's stutter is belittling or funny. And somewhere between performance and the overall tone, the moment takes on a certain poignance and aligns those who perform and/or work in the club, and distinguishes them from the bourgeois nightclub audience to whom the entertainment is directed. The other striking moment worth singling out, which portrays, in an instant, a sense of segregation and the disempowerment of blacks in white America, is the opening shot of the scene in O'Connor's office, where Smith, the agent, has brought his new talent, Helen Faraday. O'Connor (the club owner) walks over to shut a window in his office. He visually and aurally is shutting out three black workers, separated on another plane in the composition, who are conversing outside. The moment, however brief, is one of many which align the treatment of blacks with the exploitation of women, epitomized by Helen. Her donning of the white 'afro' wig in the slave-in-chains Blonde Venus act complicates this alignment. It immediately associates Helen with oppression and African

slavery, though the entire number is designed presumably by O'Connor and Smith, as a form of white erotic titillation, playing on the cultural stereotypes equating blacks with otherness, the night and sexuality; it is clearly organized to sell tickets to a segment of the population (white and wealthy) and does.

The fact that Helen's other 'numbers,' "You Little So and So" and the Paris act, are significantly different, suggests the varying circumstances and underlying implications of control. The "You Little So and So" number is Helen's first attempt at employment following her flight from her husband, publicized in the police circular/newspaper report which images her as Helen Faraday, the Blonde Venus, in her white afro wig. As earlier, the performance is preceded by the instructions Helen leaves her son, not to forget to lock the door, to finish his orange juice, etc. The narrative carefully and consistently substantiates Helen's claim to being a good mother to Johnny. The *mise-en-scène* of the performance is the most unfettered and pared down in the film; the relaxed tone seems to suggest that this period in Helen's life is a happy one and one which she controls. Helen is dressed simply in a subdued black gown and the camera follows her in a long lateral track, at a distance, behind some palm fronds. The words to the song are equally relaxed and playful, yet still assert Helen's desire and control:

It isn't often that I want a man
But when I do it's just too bad . . .

and allude to a play on a language:

You this and that
You've got me you know what
Is that the way to be?
The Greeks have words for almost everything I know
But you little so and so.⁵

The overall tone of the performance suggests Helen's satisfaction and well-being.

There are moments throughout Helen's flight with her child which attest to this contentment. In a hotel in Baltimore, Helen telephones to have a maid sent to their room and Johnny confuses the instructions by interrupting with various numbers, "151, 172, 195," saying "I hope they never find us." Helen has Johnny copy the word FATHER on a page of paper (distinctly contrasting Ned's claim later on that he has been trying to get Johnny to forget his mother). In the midst of spelling the word FATHER, a mechanical wind-up clown (father?) bounces across the table. The scene concisely illustrates the objective, critically aware perspective the film maintains: Helen may wish to remind Johnny of his father's existence, but the *mise-en-scène* suggests that his presence has long been discounted. The most extraordinary scene which illustrates the self-sufficiency of the mother-son relationship is the one of Helen and Johnny travelling on a hay cart. Helen is singing to Johnny, playing with a blade of grass, as both lie together against a backdrop which culturally signifies lovers, romance and sensuality. Despite the evidence of destitution and poverty which frame the scene (it is sandwiched between the scene in the restaurant where Helen offers to wash dishes in exchange for dinner, and the one where she is charged with 'vagrancy') Helen and Johnny are serenely happy. The judge's pronouncement in the following scene, echoing social law, "a woman who leads the life you do has no right to the custody of a minor" is challenged by Helen's remark, "I do my best" and the film's empathetic support of her pronouncement. The narrative places Helen's 'destitute' situation and recourse to prostitution within a social struc-

ture which persecutes and criminalizes the woman's desire to work or experience a sexual relationship beyond the bounds of marriage — and then proceeds radically to *support* the mother. The conditions of Helen's prostitution have, after all, only changed in form.

The film not only supports Helen's choices but presents her as the most intelligent character in the narrative. The sequence in New Orleans with Detective Wilson is remarkable, not only because it validates the obtuse detective's discovery that she is "a pretty smart girl," but in the way that the audience is asked to identify and support Helen as a mother, despite the circumstances that illustrate her experience as a prostitute who has, no doubt, brought other men back to her room (suggested in the signal she and her son have worked out). In the sequence Helen joins forces with Cora to investigate and seduce the detective who imagines he's on the look-out for Helen Faraday. The scene in the hot café/bar is highly ironic and as layered as the compartments, rooms and dividers which characterize Sternberg's mise-en-scène. The audience is aware that Detective Wilson does not know that he is confiding in the object of his pursuit (a classic example of irony) as he presents his gender's point-of-view. The conversation is worth quoting at length:

Helen: Who are you after? A bank robber?

Wilson: No, not this time. Just a woman and a kid — but she's given us one of the longest and toughest chases we've ever had.

Helen: How do you know she's in this neck of the woods?

Wilson: Oh, I know all right — I've got the whole border covered. She hasn't got a chance in the world.

Helen: You say she got away from you before?

Wilson: Yeah. I'll have to hand it to her. I had her all sewed up in Baton Rouge, or at least I thought so, but she leaves a hot trail behind her. The faster she has to travel the faster she has to work. Ha! You oughta hear some of the suckers squawk. She takes 'em like Grant took Richmond. I was only one day behind her in Savanna but she played a one night stand on me and beat it down here while I was following a chump steer all the way up to Memphis and back for the last month.

Helen: Well, she had a bit of a rest, anyway.

Wilson: You empathize with her don't you?

(Helen shrugs).

Well, she oughta get wise to herself — The way she's living now isn't doing the kid any good. Some people might call it mother love, but I don't.

Helen: What does a man know about mother love?

The detective's 'testimony' in response to her questions, describes Helen's ability to outwit, outplay and counterexploit a masculine hegemony which has the audacity to speak for her desires. What does a man know about mother love, indeed? And why is "just a woman and a kid" preoccupying the time and energy of police forces across a large number of states?

When the detective sees Johnny and realizes, finally, that his prostitute is the fugitive Helen Faraday (to which she responds with the greatest disdain, "What a brain"), she proceeds to belittle and mock an entire structure with her commanding strength:

... You and your whole crowd. You could never have caught me, not in a thousand years. And now get out and don't forget to tell that husband of mine that I'm giving the kid up. Not because he hounded me into it, but because I'm no good. You understand? No good at all, you get me? No good for anything ... except to give up the kid before it's too late.

Helen's ironic declaration that she is giving the kid up because she is "no good" clearly indicates that she is quoting both the detective and her husband, and the morality they represent. Like Helen, the narrative never endorses their judgement. The scene ends with her entering the room she shares with her son, her back to the camera, slamming the door. The moment argues eloquently against any simplistic reading of the woman's fetishisation for the male viewer. In fact, the woman in question has consistently cut herself off from masculine appropriation and control.

Helen's brief meeting with Ned in the train station directly parallels their earlier scene where he insists that Helen return the child. The earlier scene frames his blind outrage within a deep-rooted sense of his failure as a man.⁶ After promising to return the \$1,500 he owes her for his life, he states:

Ned: Let us thank this gentleman for his kindness or would you rather I shoot him dead? Oh it doesn't matter, he's not to blame. The minute I was out of sight you took up with the first man who could give you the things I couldn't. What puzzles me now is why you should want to come back to me?

Helen: I love you Ned.

Ned: Ah, send Johnny back here and clear out. Go on, what are you waiting for?

Helen: Are you going to take Johnny away from me?

Ned: You've been a rotten mother to him.

The next time they meet, Ned again relates his anger and frustration to a male capitalist value system from which he has been shut out. It is a system which commodities and appraises lives on a dollar basis and this is how Ned estimates the worth of his life and his marriage.

Ned: In this envelope are \$1,500. I've been wanting to pay this for a long time. That's what I owe you for my life. It would've been better, Helen, had you let me die. And you might as well know what that money means to me. It represents my life work. Had I been able to exploit it properly I could've made a fortune, but I sold my rights and now we're quits. Stay away from Johnny ... for good. Give him a chance to forget you ... That's the only way you can be a good mother to him now.

Because Ned is so committed and terrorized by a masculine code of ethics which cannot accept a woman's ability and self-reliance outside of her role as her husband's dependent, Ned chooses to pay his debt at the price of his career and subsequent glory. He affirms his belief that it "would've been better had you let me die." His only vengeance, and satisfaction lies in ensuring that Helen be punished through the deprivation of her son, despite what this may mean to Johnny. His self-righteous rationale — "that's the only way you can be a good mother to him now" — is, again, contradicted by the shots that follow.

It is evident that Johnny is shaken by the separation from his mother ("Daddy said I should say 'Goodbye' to you") and repeatedly asks, "Why aren't you coming with us? ... When will you come? Tomorrow? Gee whiz ... Wish you were coming now." He rocks his bear and Helen looks down, unable to look at him. As Ned leads Johnny away, there is a privileged close-up of Helen's face and of her terrified expression. The registration of her feelings of loss is remarkably unlike the cool imperviousness displayed thus far, and is the first indication that Helen is not in control. The moment is followed with a point-of-view shot from Helen's perspective, of the two mounting the train, followed by a cut back to Helen's face, her eyes filled with tears. She watches, then rises and walks over to the train tracks and the scene ends with her



The mother as prostitute in the heat of the South

watching the train pull out of her life as her scarf flutters in the breeze left in its wake.

The display of emotion and look of devastation starkly contrasts with her response to the dissolution of other significant relationships. Helen never seems to miss or regret either Ned, her husband, or Nick, her lover, whom she never attempts to track down on her travels. The moment is also unusual in terms of the star persona. Dietrich is not sentimental and, if anything, is aloof and masks any vulnerability with irony, contempt and overall intelligence and strength. The break-up is followed significantly, by the scene in the flophouse. Helen enters drunk and proceeds to mock her husband's values by giving away the representation of his "life" to the first needy person she meets. It is after this expression of protest (and solidarity with those similarly oppressed) that Helen regains her energy and leaves. She staggers past the group of women (mockingly naming herself the 'Queen of Hearts'), vows to find herself a better bed, and walks upstairs.

Helen continues to survive without her son, but she assumes a different role and strategy as a form of protest and survival. The fourth movement, beginning with the sequence in Paris, ties together a number of themes introduced at the start, and, as noted, moves towards a logical ending to the narrative. Helen is again in an environment she has chosen and it is one which excludes male intrusion (in the sense of emotional involvement and dependence). Helen's gesture of caressing the cheek of a passing chorus girl during her entrance recalls the opening physicality of the woman's group in the water, but indicates, at the same time, a great change. Helen (now Dietrich in white tux and tails) has undergone a journey where she can never look back to any idyllic moment with innocence. She has learned that if one doesn't "use men as stepping stones" one has a choice to be either exploited, appropriated, incarcerated or destroyed. In many respects this trajectory is repeated, in a more extreme and perverse form, in *The Scarlet Empress*. Catherine undergoes a similar journey, which becomes intensified when her child/heir to the throne is taken from her. She too, learns how to counter-exploit and ends up conquering the Russian army and inducting them into her services. The end of *The Scarlet Empress* is a visualization of the motto inscribed on Helen's dressing room mirror: "Down to Gehenna or up to the Throne; He travels fastest who travels alone." Catherine, in uniform, leads her men on a white steed up the palace staircase and asserts her victory. Like Helen, Catherine appropriates male garb, but given her facial expression, one senses that she has clearly paid a great price along the way. This reinforces the sense that Sternberg would have ended his film in Paris.

The song Helen performs in the Paris club vocalizes her self-protective philosophy to the audience in a Brechtian manner: "Do you think I care or stop and stare — I couldn't be annoyed." She is unperturbed by the reappearance of "Old Nick" (associating him with the devil) and ironically responds to the request "Let me come backstage Helen, will you?" with the knowing retort, "I seem to remember you came backstage once before." The marked change noted through the form of repetition and variation continues later in the dressing room; Helen receives flowers from Nick (again) and carelessly tosses away the card. She similarly avoids or defuses all of his excited questions with vague nonchalant answers. Helen, by this point, is all too aware of entrapping gender rituals. Sternberg underlines this by interjecting two shots of the largely male audience in the gallery into the scene of Helen's performance which otherwise con-

sists of a moving camera following Helen. The shots, inserted around Helen's conversation with Nick, are of men in black evening garb (directly contrasting the whiteness of Helen's tuxedo) standing up in the crowd, using binoculars to "see" better. The system of male desire and speculation is still in place but a great deal has changed. No individual male's possessive viewpoint is privileged and Helen has learnt to exploit that system to her benefit, without taking part in it.

Sternberg also opens the scene in the dressing room with a shot of Nick's reflection in a dressing room mirror, inscribed with the message, "Down to Gehenna or up to the Throne: He travels fastest who travels alone," accompanied by the illustration of a body chained and locked to a weighted ball. The image acts as commentary and Helen proceeds to explain the philosophy: she is "not in love with anybody" and "is completely happy." As she elaborates "Nothing means much to me now. I haven't a care in the world; No chains." (Aside from the suggestion that chains symbolize her entrapment as a woman in a variety of constrained and limited roles, it also recalls the imposed *mise-en-scène* of Hot Voodoo.) Nick asserts that Helen is lying, though not about her rejection of heterosexual courtship and marriage; he pinpoints the lie in relation to Johnny. Most significant is Helen's acquiescence to Nick's assertion "You care more about Johnny than anything else on earth"; "What if I did?" The meaning and tension of the scene is captured in the tight two-shot of both in front of the inscribed mirror which acts as a visual motto and reminder of Helen's defense against pain: she has chosen isolation and independence. Nick tempts Helen with the pleasure of looking up Johnny and she responds "What's the use of talking about the impossible — I'm not allowed to go near him." Nick uses Johnny as bait to make his life, as he says, more complete, promising "as soon as we land I'll manage it that you could see Johnny." Nick has done this once before, wooing Helen, in part, by caring for her son. Helen confesses her fears of seeing Johnny again and "going to pieces." She is completely in control of herself and unperturbed by Nick's reappearance but indicates that Johnny would touch a deep nerve which would threaten her new-found independence.

This confession frames her decision to leave with Nick and marry him. Again, as before, the elliptical narration skips over the courtship (and in so doing, declares its unimportance) and announces the events via a newspaper clipping in Ned's apartment. The scene in the apartment is as claustrophobic and dismal as ever. Ned is still a failure, (wittily evident in his comment to Johnny "Sorry about the pudding . . . you see I never tried to make one before") and is still unmotivated by masculine honour codes of pride, judging success and failure by financial standards. He is, as before, visually emasculated as he is framed in front of a stack of dishes. He has, as he says, little intention of having Johnny see Helen and of having his "work spoiled," but accedes, finally, as a result of Nick's 'joust' and verbal duel. He agrees to let Helen see Johnny so as to prove to Nick that he can as he says, "throw around money the same as you can . . . Let him come in, for nothing!" It is a gesture of wounded pride and has no basis in generosity.

Throughout the bargaining, shots of Helen's wide-eyed excitement as she hears Johnny's voice, are intercut. Helen leaves the two dejected men behind and rushes past them to hug Johnny. Again, the scene contrasts directly those with either Ned or Nick. Helen is affectionate, warm and effusive, and Sternberg shoots the reunion in tight two-shots.

The movement towards reconciliation does not and cannot appear believable or logical given the conditions laid out.

Even visually, Helen's stylized sleek back cap and elegant, bare-shouldered gown, balks at any attempt at reinsertion into domestic dreariness. Helen's offer to bathe Johnny (interestingly, she is never shown offering to remove dirt in the scenes outside of the familial home) and participate in the myth of 'Springtime in Germany' is linked to her carefully phrased request, "Let me stay with you *both*, Ned." The compromise, however unsatisfying and imposed, cannot undermine the intensity of the problematic articulated throughout the narrative. The Helen/Johnny relationship not only takes precedence consistently, but has proven itself as a self-contained unit. It is a love relationship which offers, a reciprocal satisfying of needs, and exists beyond and without the father.

This declaration threatens the fundamentals of patriarchal reproduction which is based on the control the father asserts through his ownership of his wife's and child's rights. The film's dramatisation of the negation of this structure is the Utopian fantasy that is highlighted as most significant. No one can assume that Helen returns home to take her place next to Ned as wife/homemaker. The transgressive illicit premise which the film offers is that both the father/husband and lover are superfluous; Helen/Dietrich can easily exist without them.

I am not suggesting, (nor do I think does the film) that the mother-son relationship should define the woman or compensate for her marginalised social position. Helen finds pleasure with her fellow actors in Germany and in controlling her performances and decisions regarding her identity on and off-stage. One can well imagine Helen living happily with Johnny in Paris, if she could legally arrange it. Women may find a variety of pleasures in their relationships with children, without having these compromise or vampirize their independence or their identities. The last place Helen seems to 'belong,' contrary to Ned's final declaration, is in the home. Given her lack of choices in a world which forbids any permutation on the father-owned family, the film has nowhere to go. It has, however, relentlessly traced Helen's oppression to the father-directed family and a masculine-dominant society. This is a very different objective from the presumed fetishisation and masking of female sexuality so often invoked to dismiss the film.

A number of critical readings of *Blonde Venus* suggest evidence of suppressed aggression or hostility evident in Helen's interaction with Johnny. I've never been convinced of this, nor have I ever felt that the film presents Johnny as an additional burden weighing Helen down. E. Ann Kaplan identifies Helen's feelings of loss at the train station, though she characterizes Johnny as being "destructive," aggressive," and "strangely perverse." It seems to me an example of imposing a reading to suit one's theoretical needs.

The representation of the child undercuts the ideal family since he is far from the usual, cherubic Hollywood infant. Instead, Johnny is throughout associated with the mechanical and destructive. In the early shot of Dietrich bathing him, Johnny is aggressive, first trying to "kill" his toy crocodile and then blaring his trumpet in his mother's face. Before he goes to bed the child is seen with a toy gun and then with a loud and ugly mechanical toy. As he falls asleep, listening to the narrative of his parents' meeting, he constantly pulls the eye of the bear out of its socket, letting it then plop back. Later shots show him similarly associated with noisy mechanical toys, and one eerie scene opens up with a close-up of a frightening mask that turns out to be lodged on the back of Johnny's head. The film's distaste for the nuclear family and for the domestic emerges in this strangely perverse and aggressive child.⁷

In *Venus de Marlene*, Robin Wood comments on the mother's interaction with her son and draws some of the same conclusions. He mentions, for example, that during the telling of the bed-time fairy-tale, "the mother, teeth clenched, suddenly shakes the child in an outburst of "playful" aggression." (p. 60) He also traces the roots of this aggression to Helen's entrapment at the hands of Ned Faraday and Nick Townsend.

The woman caught between these male pincers has only one object left *she* can control: her child. On the basis of his previous work it must have seemed very odd that Sternberg would turn to a mother-love story, yet in retrospect it seems perfectly logical, even necessary: the films with Dietrich are centrally concerned with the limits and conditions of a woman's control. Generically, mother-love must be the film's main "positive"; although nothing explicitly undercuts it, I don't think it emerges as such with any conviction. The imagery generally suggests that the mother is repressing, babying, imprisoning her child in the interests of an ideological purity. She is also in a sense using him, as the one aspect of her world that she can dominate — though "dominate" is again misleading, as her treatment of the boy is at every point dominated in its turn by ideological concepts of motherhood, family and social roles. (p. 62)

The mother's relationship with Johnny and her "love" for him is, therefore, a manifestation of her own frustrated entrapment displaced onto the child. It follows, therefore, that the relationship is destructive to Helen and is one from which she, unconsciously if not consciously seeks release. Wood notes that Townsend surrenders Helen to "the man she loves (in *Blonde Venus*, the child to whom she is obsessively attached) at the sacrifice of his own involvement with her — a surrender that . . . can be read as leaving her free to destroy herself." Finally, Wood reads Helen's speech to detective Wilson, wherein she offers to surrender Johnny, "I'm no good at all, no good for anything. Except to give the kid up before it's too late" and her accompanying smile, as "an expression of relief and release." He goes on to mention that "Its counteracting image is her deeply ashamed hanging of her head as Faraday removes the child from her at the station — except that there we are carefully prevented from seeing her face." (p. 62) I find this interpretation unsupported by the film. Helen can manage easily without either Nick Townsend or Ned Faraday, and her depression in the flop-house is not linked to the loss of either; I don't think one is invited to read the separation at the train station as any form of welcomed release. Patterns of 'control' are evident in Helen's interaction with Johnny (though they are bound to social notions of care) however, one cannot easily or simply dismiss the relationship as one that parallels Helen's domination by the men in the film.

It is difficult to detach cultural assumptions surrounding motherhood from conditions of women's oppression, as this identity speaks of domestic sequestration and social marginalisation; it can, however, offer intense love relationships which, under less oppressive circumstances, can be enjoyed. I'm not convinced that Helen or the film can sort through and present their distinctions. As in the tradition of the genre, Helen's awareness is limited; though the audience is allowed a more comprehensive understanding of the limitations and lack of choices Helen faces, the film never attempts to solve the contradictions endemic to these roles and relationships. *Blonde Venus* does, however, offer a critical perspective on existing conditions and points of the fantasy of "What if . . ."

Peter Baxter's reading of *Blonde Venus*, "Blonde Venus: Memory, Legend and Desire," (*Cineaction!* #8, Spring '87) places emphasis on the mother-child relationship but defines its significance in Lacanian terms; in other words, the film enacts the trauma of the male child's separation from the maternal body and the movement towards his entry into the Symbolic. The film pivots around this loss which institutes the play of desire.

From the first shot, of the forest pool, to the last, of the music box, the movement of the film has been to set an object into the gaping place of desire. The work of the film is to show how it is that Helen comes into that mythical place. (p. 48)

Helen's significance in the film is filtered through the masculine child's psyche; the orientation of Baxter's reading is encapsulated in the final shot of the film, clearly expressing Johnny's sleepy, indistinct perspective, where one sees a child's hand grasping for the musical toy beyond the bars of the crib. This object, by now, represents Helen, and the image crystallizes the moment of separation and the child's yearning for the plenitude that will never again be. The legend of 'Springtime in Germany' has been disrupted and the memory is irretrievable. Baxter suggests that *Blonde Venus* sets up the cyclical trajectory upon which the male child will embark: he will substitute this "barred object" (p. 49) with another female who will attract his gaze and acquiesce to become his wife. Helen is left to accept "the position of the wife/mother in the reign of the father," but "her return carries with it the "compensatory" satisfaction of her relation to Johnny, the fulfillment that is left to woman in the social order . . ." (p. 49)

I mention Baxter's reading because it exemplifies the kinds of limitations which come into play the moment a theoretical grid like that of Lacan/Metz/Baudry is imposed. The entire experience of spectatorship and narrative meaning is compressed to satisfy the logic that all Realist narratives are about the formation and institution of masculine identity. Although Baxter recognizes that Dietrich, at times, can also be positioned as the subject of desire, (he uses the example of Amy Jolly in *Morocco*) there is little he can do with this perception, given his reliance on a framework which ignores female spectatorship (or the possibilities of producing an informed, critically aware reading) and forever situates the woman as fetish object.

This reading denies Helen's very *tangible*, and not 'mythical' place in the film, and the narrative's orientation towards her (supported by the ironic commentary provided through style, mise-en-scène, performance etc.). It relegates Helen's significance to an untouchable state of Otherness, whereas the film has very carefully supported the woman's social position, represented through the director and star's jointly authored declaration of "I am Marlene." The subjective final shot of the film, which allows one to experience Johnny's frustrated point-of-view, reiterates bitterly the film's thematic: the mother-child relationship is impeded by the father's presence and can only suffocate within the confines of the patriarchal family.

Dietrich's role in *Blonde Venus* dramatically expands upon the Dietrich star persona. The highly sexual woman (whose sexuality is always directed across gender and beyond the

bounds of a solitary admirer) can also be a mother. In a world which drains desire and activity out and away from the mother, this reinjection, devoid as it is of shame, sacrifice or a heavily burdened conscience, revitalizes and opens up the possibilities inherent in the woman's film through a tempting and liberating fantasy. Motherhood is not the end of a mature integrated sexuality and the mother-child relationship, *outside of the family*, can be a form of satisfaction and empowerment which the excluded male fears. It is not only what the male does not know about mother love; it is, more precisely, about what he fears its implication to be.

Notes

1. See John Grierson's comments in "Directors of the Thirties" from *Grierson on Documentary* edited by Forsyth Hardy. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947).
2. Rudolf Arnheim's in "Josef von Sternberg," reprinted in Baxter, Peter (ed.) *Sternberg*. (London: BFI, 1980).
3. Charles Silver's in *Marlene Dietrich*. (New York: Pyramid Communications Inc., 1979), pp. 39-45.
4. John Baxter's in *The Cinema of Josef von Sternberg*. (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1971), pp. 101-109. (He also condemns Sternberg's decision "to blend childhood autobiographical details with material relating to his contemporary attitudes." p. 108.) Two of the most quoted feminist readings include: Claire Johnston (ed.), *Notes on Women's Cinema*. (London: Society for Education in Film and Television, BFI, 1975), and Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (*Screen*, Autumn 1975).
5. Wood outlines a similar variation of the above, with what he terms the phases of Helen's "descent." (p. 61)
6. This is a central theme in a number of the Sternberg/Dietrich films, most outstandingly characteristic of the last two collaborations, *The Scarlet Empress* and *The Devil Is A Woman*.
7. Deborah Thomas notes, in her article on *Blonde Venus*, to be published in an upcoming issue of *Movie*, "Cora — then Helen — visibly alter before our eyes as they put on, like hats, the respective roles they know Wilson will expect them to play . . . Cora and Helen, sisters under the skin, enact racist and sexist stereotypes (the smiling black, the femme fatale) for this representative of the law, precisely because it is both what they know he expects and also what is least likely to alert his suspicions, in order to use them for their own united purpose." There is another indication of this when Detective Wilson returns with Helen and repeats to Cora/Annie that he's "just browsin' around, and she replies, "Yessir boss . . . I can see that."
8. The theme of language, in terms of what it names and what it masks, reminiscent of the traditions of the melodrama, is an important one in *Blonde Venus*. The film points to naming as a tool of male power. The irony of Smith's suggestion that Helen change her name from boring Faraday to a more exciting Jones — "a name that's easy to say but hard to forget" — is later followed by O'Connor's remark, "What did you say her name was? Jones . . . Well we'll change that." This is stated in the scene which follows O'Connor's gesture to shut out the black workers' voices and shortly precedes that with the stammering bartender. Helen also explains to Taxi that O'Connor named her the 'Blonde Venus' and told her "it would help." Detective Wilson, typically drawing from his schema of stereotypes calls Cora Annie. In the flophouse, Helen pulls out the Queen of Hearts and states ironically, "that's me" — the name comes up again, in relation to Concha in *The Devil Is A Woman*. In the Paris nightclub sequence, Helen is billed as Helen Jones on the marquee; she has dissociated herself from Faraday and keeps the innocuous stage name that her agent had given her.
9. These concerns are voiced in a number of male melodramas, which range from Lang's *Scarlet Street* to Scorsese's *Raging Bull*.
10. Kaplan, E. A. "Fetishism and the repression of Motherhood in Von Sternberg's *Blonde Venus* (1932)," *Women and Film, Both Sides of the Camera* (Methuen: London, 1983) p. 56.



What follows is an excerpt from the introduction to my recent book, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, the paperback edition of which has just been released; it is reprinted here by kind permission of my publishers, Columbia University Press.

Readers will find a very close relationship between this and the new article I have contributed to this issue —so close that there is some unavoidable overlap, for which I apologise. The new piece takes up and develops certain themes that are introduced here — I think with greater confidence. In the year that separates the two articles I have been encouraged both by a number of positive responses to my book (the fact that there have been, as far as I know, no negative ones should be attributed to the fact that all the magazines and journals that represent the contemporary critical hegemony have chosen to ignore it, finding it no doubt unworthy of their consideration), and by my discovery of the work of Alice Miller shortly after the book was first published. Miller's books (of which I remain quite critical) have helped me to formulate and strengthen convictions that were already somewhat hazily present, and I want here to reaffirm the debt I owe her.

Revisiting Hitchcock 25 years later necessarily involves reopening the issue of authorship. So much has happened in the interim. At the most extreme, the author as controlling and responsible agent has disappeared altogether: Barthes' celebrated formulation, "The author does not write, he is written," seems to have gained widespread currency throughout the semiotic/structuralist school. There have also been numerous attempts to reformulate the notion of the author: Peter Wollen's suggestion that we distinguish between Hawks (a person) and "Hawks" (a body of work bearing his signature as director); the *Cahiers du Cinéma* notion of

everything else (sometimes valuing a director's work just because it could be demonstrated to have one) and, at the worst, claimed or at least implied that the author was solely and exclusively responsible for the meaning and quality of his texts. Its opponents countered this by pointing out that the author did not invent the language and conventions of his medium, the genre within which the work was located, the ideological assumptions inherent in the culture and necessarily reproduced (with whatever inflections) in the individual text; neither did the author control the conditions of production. However necessary at the time to counterbalance auteurist

armed from the head of Zeus.

The crux is of course the introduction into criticism of concepts of ideology. If one begins to see a film as the product of multiple determinants — the auteur, other contributors, generic conventions, studio conditions, the prevailing social/political climate, etc. — one quickly sees that all these are contained within something bigger, all-embracing: the assumptions, values, and ideas available within the culture, which may extend back from this week's latest trend to the dawn of the human race. Behind "the author does not write, he is written" lies the assumption that we are all slaves or prisoners of ideology, that we have neither control, responsibility, nor the power of decision, that everything we do, say, or write is determined: we are the prisoners of language, and language is ideology made concrete. It seems true that we cannot live outside ideology — if by ideology we mean the human need to formulate ideas about and attitudes to life and relationships, ideas, and attitudes that will inevitably be influenced (positively or negatively) by those already available within the culture, or available from other cultures to which we have access. In this sense, ideology would appear to be one of the major phenomena that distinguish humans from the lower animals. I presume that our cat Max does not have a defined ideological position, although he does have opinions about certain basic needs such as food and cuddles, and at times expresses them quite vociferously. If we cannot live outside ideology, this does not — it seems to me — make us its slaves. Unlike Max, I am able to choose my ideological position: the combined facts that I know I must have a position and that many different positions are available make choice possible. That choice will of course be partly determined by many factors, but the more I become aware of those factors, and aware of the positions that are available to me, the more responsible I shall be for my decision. This constitutes the basic difference between the two halves of this book: the author of *Hitchcock's Films* was not aware that he had an ideological position any more than Max; the author of *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* accepts full responsibility for his, whatever complex forces — personal, psychological, intellectual, political — may have contributed to its formation, because he has consciously and deliberately adopted it.

"The author does not write, he is written": it may have made useful polemics at a certain phase in the evolu-

AUTHORSHIP REVISITED

by Robin Wood

"inscription" (it is Ford's "inscription" that is held largely responsible for the ideological rupturing of *Young Mr. Lincoln*); Raymond Bellour's substitution of the term "enunciator." All of these seem to me interesting, suggestive, useful up to a point, but finally unsatisfying — the usefulness being primarily a matter of drawing attention to the problems.

Initially, the assault on the notion of personal authorship was a perfectly justifiable response to the early excesses of auteur theory. Auteurism emphasized the personal signature at the expense of

excess, this scarcely constituted a novel or startling revelation. Anyone with even a casual familiarity with the history of Shakespeare criticism will be aware that critics through all periods have not generally credited Shakespeare with the invention of the English language, blank verse, the iambic pentameter, the forms, genres and conventions of the Elizabethan drama, or even the plots of his own plays. No sane person, as far as I am aware, has ever sought to claim that a work of art or entertainment has ever been produced by some kind of virgin birth, or like Minerva springing fully

tion of critical theory/practice, but does anyone seriously believe it? It is one thing to acknowledge the myriad influences on one's work (many of which one can never even hope to become aware of), another to abdicate from personal responsibility for what one is saying by subscribing to a total determinism. I am never convinced that proponents of this doctrine really apply it to themselves. When Balzac produced *Sarrasine* he did not write, he was written; presumably, then, Barthes "was written" when he produced his reading of *Sarrasine*, *S/Z*. Or is a (thoroughly arrogant and presumptuous) distinction being made between critical discourse and creative discourse? Stephen Heath, in his massive and intellectually very impressive tour de force on *Touch of Evil*, clearly follows Barthes in seeing Welles as "written"; does he equally disclaim responsibility for his reading of the film? — was he "written" also, and if so by whom or what? One could easily list the influences on the article, and Heath was obviously fully aware of them, but it still appears to be the outcome of a personally accepted commitment (the feature, in fact, that gives it its distinction).

The Barthesian pronouncement is in effect merely a variation (though a peculiarly drab and demoralizing one) on a notion of authorship usually associated with the excesses of Romanticism: the notion that the author is "taken over." It exists in many forms: the religious author becomes merely the instrument of the Divine Voice, the pantheist surrenders to the "life force," the Freudian to the subconscious or the unconscious, the novelist is "taken over" by his characters. The reduction of this to the notion that we are simply taken over by ideology is a way of denying life any spiritual dimension, and of denying the possibility that any forces exist within us that are not reducible to "ideology" — forces which might be struggling against ideological determination at some deep level. Personally, I far prefer D. H. Lawrence's formulation "Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me" to "the author does not write, he is written." The former implies voluntary submission to forces greater than oneself (if one can choose one's ideology one can equally choose one's gods), the latter mere impotence and passivity; a wind is dynamic and transformative, ideology merely much dead weight from the past. The drive to transform culture, for example, and the protest that animates it, must come from somewhere: merely from some alternative ideology that we have in some mys-

terious way absorbed? (from where?). The "religious" (I don't mean orthodox Christian — or orthodox anything) belief in forces both within and beyond the self seems far more politically usable than the sense of powerless submission to all-pervasive, all-embracing, inescapable "ideology." If we cannot "write" but can only "be written," if any sense of control, self-definition, responsibility, and personal commitment we feel is illusory, then why bother to do anything? I have a strong desire that our civilization, and the human race, should not be annihilated in a nuclear war. Is this desire reducible to a product of "ideology" (what ideology??) I have an equally strong desire (indeed the two are exactly complementary) that we might move forward to some form of authentically liberated community united and motivated by love and cooperation rather than hatred, distrust, and competition. Is this desire merely "ideological"? — which is to say, can such a desire be explained solely in terms of my conditioning?

What is it, then, that lies in the shadowland beyond ideology? One can scarcely define it except in oblique and nebulous ways, since its defining characteristic is to be indefinable. The moment it becomes concrete, takes on flesh, it inevitably becomes ideological, the "flesh" being always culturally specific. I am forced, reluctantly, to have recourse to the phrase "religious experience"; reluctantly, not because I am afraid of it myself, but because it will certainly be willfully misunderstood and misrepresented. (I can already read the reviews: "After his shaky conversion to Marxism ten years ago, Wood has now converted even more abruptly to Christianity . . ."). I must, then, step very carefully.

That Marxism dissociated itself rigorously from all forms of orthodox or organized religion was of course an absolute historical necessity. It seems to me now that Marxism's major limitation, which has yet to be seriously confronted, is its lack of interest in religious experience, the religious impulse: its refusal, if you like, of a spiritual dimension. It heedlessly threw out the baby of spiritual regeneration with the bathwater of religious dogma. The terms are, once again, dangerous, simply because, in our culture, rather as the term "sexuality" immediately evokes genital copulation, so words like "religious" or "spiritual" immediately evoke Christianity. The organized religions are, precisely, the ideological flesh, always compromised, always sub-

ject (as Marxism has also proved to be) as they become ideologically crystallized, to revisionism and reaction, a hardening into dogma (St. Paul played Stalin to Christ's Lenin). We should note, however, that all the great religions have been in their first, relatively pure phases revolutionary, and were persecuted as such. In other words, the authentic religious impulse has always been intimately associated with drives toward liberation. It is the expression of everything within us that rebels against constraint: of the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor, of the libido against the superego, of (to borrow a title from Norman O. Brown) "Life Against Death." At bottom it is the instinctual revolt against ideology of everything that ideology seeks to contain or repress. That is why, if we associate it with the spiritual, we must equally associate it (and learn to comprehend the two) with the sexual. Without wishing to reduce the manifold delights of erotic experience to orgasm, I don't think the orgasm has been overrated. All forms of the sexual, like all forms of the spiritual, must inevitably be culturally specific, hence ideological. The significance of the orgasm is that it takes us, as we pass the point of no return, beyond choice and control, and beyond ideology, to a place where indeed "Alle Menschen werden Bruder" (one regrets only the inherent sexism of Schiller's language). It should be recognized as corresponding to those moments of spiritual exaltation — the momentary intimation of the transcendent — that we commonly describe as religious experience. One must here acknowledge the pervasive tendency of our culture to turn everything, orgasms included, into commodities. Yet — as Pasolini so piercingly perceived (it is the theme of *Teorema*) — it is the fusion of the sexual and the spiritual that, within the debasements of late capitalist culture, provides the surest way to subversion and revolution.

One may glance here at the disparate religious manifestations of our own century. They confirm fully the association of the authentic religious impulse and revolution. There is the great chain of works by Stravinsky, from the *Rite of Spring* and *Les Noces* through the *Symphony of Psalms* and the *Mass to Threni*, consistently revolutionary on the aesthetic and emotional levels, however orthodox certain of their texts. But it is significant that the most convincing religious statement in 20th-century music should be the work of a composer dedicated throughout his career to radi-

calism and protest — and a man who, in his 70s, could still fall passionately in love: Janacek's *Glagolitic Mass*, in which religion and revolution, the spiritual and the sexual, become one within a celebration of struggle and an affirmation of life. (I choose the *Mass* because it has a specifically religious text, in the traditional sense, and because it is arguably the greatest of Janacek's many late masterpieces. From my viewpoint, *The Diary of One Who Disappeared* is equally a religious work.)

The *Glagolitic Mass* at once incomparably dramatizes and transcends the Christian text: its feeling is as much pagan as Christian, the creative impulse it embodies rooted in a commitment to nature and fertility. The Credo, with its repeated, unifying "Veruju" ("I believe"), is above all an affirmation of life itself rather than of a specific creed. Its supreme moment of ecstasy, the tenor soloist's affirmation of belief in "one Catholic and apostolic Church" ("katolicesku i apostolsku crkvu") — surely one of the most uplifting moments in 20th-century music — transcends any actual commitment to a denominational Christianity, both in the work's refusal of the (sanctified) Latin text and in the moment's achieved sense of organic, earned growth out of the musical material. The entire work is set apart simply by being so utterly unlike any of the culturally sanctioned settings of the text: its tone consistently repudiates Christianity's reactionary elements, the emphasis on self-sacrifice, resignation, acceptance of misery in *this* world as a guarantee of beatitude in the next. The *Mass* conspicuously lacks a "Dona nobis pacem." I am ignorant as to whether this text is lacking from the Slavonic version of the *Mass* or whether its omission was Janacek's personal decision. Whichever is the case, the point lies in what Janacek replaces it with: a dark and turbulent organ solo (liturgically, for the exit of the clergy) and a fiery and triumphant orchestral postlude (for the exit of the congregation, on one level enacting the return to sunlight from the darkness of the church), precisely reversing the moods of the opening Introduction and Kyrie. "Give us peace" is replaced by a further development of the work's passionate dark/light dialectic: struggle issuing in triumph that is above all a celebration of energy. In this age when intellectuals are bent on reducing human experience to an arid heap of signifiers, it seems necessary sometimes to exclaim with Janacek, "Veruju!"

At the other end of the scale we find

the ultimate debasement of Christianity in the sordid proliferation of "fundamentalist" sects, where the religious experience is systematically perverted and degraded: sexually repressive, spiritually impoverished, politically reactionary. Rock music even at its most debased, perverse, and negative is closer to the religious impulse than fundamentalist Christianity.

Ultimately, the religious impulse might be described as the drive to affirmation: Albert Schweitzer's wonderful phrase "reverence for life" comes to mind. Pace Hitchcock's Catholic apologists, I would assert that the major limitation of his work — its *defining* limitation, of which its peculiar force and distinction are the corollary — is the relative weakness within it (in a film like *Frenzy*, the almost total absence) of the religious impulse as I have sought to define it. I threw out above a reference to Pasolini: Hitchcock's achievement seems to me decidedly superior, yet it lacks precisely the quality that gives Pasolini's work its (very intermittent and compromised) distinction, the sense of wonder. This is another way of putting the reservations that I attempted to put forth in the "Retrospective" of 1977.

Closely tied to affirmation, another key word would be creativity: the creative impulse, the drive to create, the pleasure of creating, seems common to all cultures and all levels of culture, manifesting itself, in however stunted a form, even within the most distressingly hostile and brutalizing social conditions such as are dominant in our own culture. The pleasure of creativity — for example, the pleasure I am experiencing at this moment in writing this paragraph — cannot be reduced to ideology even if, as always, the form it takes is ideological. (The pleasure, I should add, is in no sense directly proportionate to any "absolute" assessment of value; it is the pleasure of feeling that one has done one's best. I don't think it is reducible to a sense of satisfaction — inevitably weary and relieved — in fulfilling one's duties at the level of the "work ethic.") Like sexuality, like religious experience, creativity will always of necessity take on culturally specific forms: it is obvious that Shakespeare could not have composed Mozart's operas, nor Mozart written Shakespeare's plays. Yet this seems pitifully inadequate grounds on which to deny the creativity — to flaunt another forbidden word, the genius — of Mozart and Shakespeare. But creativity needs wider definition than this: it might be defined simply as the blossom-

ing of the soul. With roots in the impoverished, polluted soil of patriarchal capitalism, few souls can blossom freely, realizing their potential. What is amazing, what amply and daily confirms one's sense of "reverence for life," is that so many blossom at all, in conditions where one would have no right to expect anything beyond the most stunted, blighted growth. The resilience of the creative, the religious human spirit is a source of endless astonishment.

It is in relation to human creativity that one returns to Marxism; if the human soul is to blossom freely, the social soil must be changed, and only Marxist social theory — with all its limitations, blindnesses, repressions, and shortcomings — points the way toward the necessary transformation. A Marxism crossed with feminism, incorporating a rethought humanism, and animated by a religious impulse as I have defined it, could give us the way toward the transfigured civilization envisioned by Janacek in his late music, the valid longing for which motivates all authentic creativity. It might also eliminate, or at least greatly diminish, the fear of death. Aside from the dispensable, imaginary terrors inculcated by guilt-oriented religions, the fear of death seems deeply connected to the sense of nonfulfillment — of energies dissipated in alienated labour, of potential cruelly wasted, of creativity frustrated. If the soul could blossom freely, it would fear death no more than the perfect rose fears the dropping of its petals.

The various reformulations of the notion of "the author" noted above call for brief consideration here. Wollen's distinction between Hawks and "Hawks" seems largely mystificatory: one has to posit such an intimate connection between the two (Hawks the man not only directed but produced many of the films that make up the body of work labeled "Hawks," and also chose the subjects, cooperated on the screenplays, and improvised with the actors), that we are really back where we started. Bellour's "enunciator" is initially tempting. The implication is that the realized material of the film (in the widest, most inclusive sense — "material" here covers subject, plot, thematic content, and the whole mass of ideological assumptions/tensions/contradictions enacted through them) comes from the culture and is "enunciated" by the filmmaker, the process of enunciation covering the entire spectrum of mise-en-scène and editing. But on reflection, this raises more problems



Tippi Hendren as Marnie

than it solves. On the one hand, any account of the "enunciated" (what the film says, what it means) would swiftly make clear that Hitchcock is just as implicated in that as he is in the "enunciation." On the other hand, contrariwise, Hitchcock's enunciation reveals multiple determining influences including German Expressionism and Soviet montage theory (as I argue in the "Retrospective" added for the third edition of *Hitchcock's Films*): the "enunciation" is no more (and no less) his than the "enunciated."

The *Cahiers* notion of "inscription" comes much closer to being usable. Here it seems profitable to compare, briefly, two celebrated and seminal critical texts offered as exemplary readings of Hollywood films: the *Cahiers' Young Mr. Lincoln* article and Stephen Heath's work on *Touch of Evil*. The two are often linked and there are good reasons for this: the methodologies have common sources (Althusser, Barthes, Lacan, Metz); both insist at the outset that they are offering something significantly different from traditional "interpretations"; both offer a reading of a specific film as exemplary — that is to say, the reading is to reveal certain general principles of the working of classical Hollywood narrative, rather than simply heightening the reader's appreciation/understanding of a particular work of art or artifact. Both articles, in fact, patently produce interpretations of the respective films (and highly tendentious and problematic ones at that); one may concede that their claim to reveal general principles is justified (and is what gives both pieces their interest and value), though one must add that this is scarcely a new phenomenon in criticism: an intelligent and firmly "traditional" aesthetician such as E.H. Gombrich is equally concerned with exposing general principles.

The Heath article is dauntingly impressive (I still find sections of it virtually impenetrable) and immensely irritating, notably in its attitude to "interpretations" of Welles' film. Heath is careful to pay these polite lip service ("The question here is *in no sense*" — my italics — "to refuse these interpretations, to which systems in the film clearly respond"). At other points a marked animus against traditional approaches obtrudes, as here where, significantly, Heath confronts the notion of the "author";

The opening of *Touch of Evil* with its "extraordinary" tracking shot has become a famous point of reference in "film culture" and the

"breathtaking achievement" it represents is one element among many others which can be systematized in reading as the signature "Orson Welles," the style of the author.

The function of Heath's quotation marks (they do not appear to mark actual quotations, as no source is given) can only be to express sarcasm: a "film culture" that sees the opening shot of *Touch of Evil* as "extraordinary" is clearly beyond the pale (I am perplexed as to the standards by which it could be considered "ordinary," as I can think of nothing closely comparable to it in the whole of Hollywood cinema). I am not and never have been happy with the state of "film culture," and I believe my record is clear on this; I do not think, on the other hand, that traditional aesthetics and notions of authorship can simply be dismissed with a lofty contempt. Heath's entire article, by the way, has the air of presenting itself as a "breathtaking achievement" — which, like Welles' movie, it is on a certain level, both authors being very much aware of and insistent upon their virtuosity.

Heath's attitude to authorship is succinctly outlined in a sentence that (almost) follows the above: "The sole interest here is in the author as an effect of the text and only in so far as the effect is significant in the production of the filmic system, is a textual effect." I am not at all clear as to the distinction between "an effect of the text" and "a textual effect": if Welles in an effect of the text (a finished product), how can he also produce an effect *on* it? (If there is no distinction the last phrase is redundant — but perhaps Heath did not write but was written at that point, i.e., he lapsed into a kind of lazy automatic doodling). Nor am I clear as to what either of these phrases actually means. If one reduces the term "text" (but of course one can't) to mean "narrative content," then Welles' all-pervading authorial flourishes are by no means its necessary product ("effect"); the narrative content of the extraordinary opening tracking shot (which lasts not "some two and a half minutes," as Heath asserts, but a few seconds over three, the time in which — as the opening close-up shows us — the bomb is due to explode, which is its whole point) could easily have been rendered in a Hitchcockian montage of 50 shots or more. If "text" means (as it must) the film in its highly specific material entirety, then it is quite easy to show that, one or two brief non-descript passages apart, Welles' "signa-

ture" dominated every aspect of it, everything that gives a filmic text its texture: camera angle, camera movement, lighting, shot length, even most of the editing which (though strictly speaking it was taken out of Welles' hands) was obviously conceived as integral to the mise-en-scène. (The point is not contradicted by the fact that Welles' editing decisions would have differed in detail; infinite variations are possible within the same style).

The reduction of Welles to "an effect of the text" is a necessary step in Heath's ultimate reduction of *Touch of Evil* to a conventional "classical Hollywood narrative": its project turns out to be, yet again, the repudiation/repression of aberrant (i.e., nonpatriarchal) sexuality, and the construction of the heroine (Susan/Janet Leigh) as "good object." The reductivism (which finally overrides all the elaborate paraphernalia of an ultra-close reading, complete with pages of diagrams) brings to mind the reductivism of another virtuoso of modern film criticism, Raymond Bellour, who once remarked that *North by Northwest* and *Bringing Up Baby* are really the same film: both end with Cary Grant pulling the heroine up by her arm from a precipitous drop, constructing once again the heterosexual couple. One might well argue that the two films are in fact polar opposites: *North by Northwest* is about Grant learning to be responsible, *Bringing Up Baby* is about Grant learning to be irresponsible, both outcomes presented, within the very different dramatic and authorial contexts, in the most positive terms. If the two are linked it is in their disrespectful attitude to the patriarchal organization, skeptical in Hitchcock, openly derisive in Hawks. As for *Touch of Evil*, the ultimate overriding effect of the film — its seductive and insidious invitation to the spectator to accept corruption as a fact of existence, privileging Quinlan over Vargas — has almost nothing to do with the production of the "good object" (which the film treats in the most perfunctory way) and a very great deal to do with Welles' authorship. Heath's "reading" misses it entirely. Both Heath and Bellour have done much to push forward the bounds of film theory (the later chapters of this book are indebted in various ways to both of them), which makes it the greater pity that the conclusions their analyses reach tend to be reductive, simplistic and banal. It is not quite, but almost, the case that the mountains, in labor, produce a ridiculous mouse.

The *Cahiers' Young Mr. Lincoln* anal-



Wendell Corey, Grace Kelly and James Stewart in *Rear Window*

ysis, while it uses some of the same methodological/ideological apparatus and preconceptions, is quite different in effect. For all the apparent commitment to Barthesian notions of "plurality," it seems to me that Heath and Bellour both ultimately close off the texts they "read": they turn out to be the same old "classical narrative text" all over again. The *Cahiers* reading substantially opens up Ford's film, presenting it in terms of contradictions, internal strains, and tensions. Crucial to this is a perceptibly different attitude to authorship. Far from being merely "an effect of the text," Ford's (active) "inscription" is viewed as the prime factor in the production of contradiction, the intervention that, through its resistances, disrupts and throws off course a seemingly innocuous and conservative ideological project. This version of authorship strikes me as far more defensible, profitable, and politically suggestive than Heath's "textual effect." In fact, it has a lot to recommend it. On the one hand it rejects any equation of authorship with

"the artist's conscious intentions"; on the other it acknowledges that the intervention of a particular author may be a (the?) prime determinant of a film's interest, without reducing the film (the "text," a texture woven from many strands) to the author's exclusive property/creation. Yet I am not entirely happy with the acceptance of "inscription" as the answer to all our problems. There seems a certain ambiguity as to what (in practical, concrete terms) the word actually means: it can easily become synonymous with "direction," or even "visual style" (the *Cahiers* writers make much of the "excesses" of Ford's "writing," for example, the recurrent "castrating stare" of Lincoln), and that is not enough. Typically, the major Hollywood directors have been involved in their films at every state — choice of subject, construction of the scenario, shooting, editing, even (as with Hitchcock) promotion. It follows that one cannot simply talk of Ford's "inscription" producing strains, disruptions, etc., in preexistent material with

an independent identity outside that inscription. The strains and disruptions must already be present in the inscription itself (if one takes the term to cover all of Ford's intervention throughout the realization of the project) and ultimately within the ideology itself.

I shall not propose an alternative term of my own as a solution. I rather like the one I have already introduced: "intervention": because it can refer to the entire spectrum of the author's possible activities, from the choice of subject to editing. But I wouldn't wish to adopt it exclusively or claim it as an adequate answer to all the problems of authorship. Instead, I offer a series of loosely interconnected propositions which should serve as explanatory background if and when I refer to Hitchcock as the "author" of his films.

1. The author's intentions. There was indeed a person called Alfred Hitchcock who, over the course of a long career, achieved a quite unusual degree of control over his films, at all stages of their

construction/creation. This is not to claim that he had unconstrained freedom of choice: restrictions existed in many forms, from the tangible and documented interference of powerful producers (Selznick, for example) to the less tangible but perhaps even more powerful circumscriptions imposed inwardly — the fear of losing money, of losing one's public, of exposing oneself too nakedly. To reject the "intentionalist fallacy" (the notion that an artist's expressed intentions have a definitive authority in interpreting his or her work; the complementary notion that the author's intentions are what the critic is supposed to interpret and evaluate) is not to reject the fact that on certain levels the creation of a work of art or an artifact constitutes an intentional act. Hitchcock generally knew — I repeat, on certain levels — why he wanted to place his camera where he did, why he wanted to move it, why he wanted to cut, why he wanted his actors to move in certain ways, turn their heads at certain moments, speak their lines with certain intonations. This fully conscious, intentional level cannot possibly account for everything in the film and cannot account for the more important, deeper levels of meaning; but I cannot see that it is irrelevant or unworthy of consideration.

2. The author's personal psychology. We are all constructed by our culture, yet each of us is unique. The semiological emphasis on the spectator who (already constructed by culture) is then constructed by film after film has been useful to a degree, but again it proves ultimately reductive on both sides of the camera/screen, reducing both filmmaker and film recipient: the uniqueness both of artist and spectator is overridden in favor of reproducing yet again the "classical Hollywood text" and its passive victim. Below the obviously intentional level of Hitchcock's films — the level of filmic skills — lies a shadowy level where the intended and unintended, conscious and unconscious, merge indistinguishably: the level of thematic content. It can be argued that Hitchcock's cinema, on all levels (thematic, formal, methodological), is built upon the struggle to dominate and the dread of impotence, and that within the films this most characteristically takes the form of the man's desire (frequently unrealized) to dominate the woman. It is easy to see that such a thematic belongs to much more than one individual filmmaker: it is "in the culture." Equally, however, one can

argue that in Hitchcock's films it achieves a quite extraordinary intensity and complexity so that it takes on an importance it does not have in, say, the work of Renoir or Hawks. This is an example of what is meant by asserting that great films belong both to their authors and to the culture.

It follows that I don't consider biographical and autobiographical material entirely irrelevant to film criticism: there are valid uses to be made of Hitchcock's many personal anecdotes and of the type of work represented by Donald Spoto's *The Dark Side of Genius* (critical as one may be of the particular instance). One's initial impulse to reject such resources is well motivated: one is all too familiar with the kind of interpretation that starts from a biographical fact and proceeds to explain (or explain away) the films purely in reference to it. The legitimate use of such information is exactly the reverse: the biographical data may confirm or consolidate a read-

interesting that, throughout the filming of *Vertigo*, Hitchcock compelled Kim Novak to wear certain kinds of clothing which she strongly resisted — precisely what James Stewart does to her within the diegesis. To reduce the film to that kind of anecdotal significance would be merely a way of rejecting or evading the implications of its profound and disturbing investigation of the sources and mechanisms of romantic love within our culture.

3. The author and ideological construction. "Personal psychology," of course, is not and cannot be merely "personal." The infant is born into ideology, expressed immediately in the way it is clothed. The traditional "blue for a boy, pink for a girl" is but the beginning, and crudest manifestation, of a whole long process of gender construction of which psychoanalytic theory has established the formidable power. Whether one accepts the Freudian model (the oedi-



Hitchcock and Kim Novak/Judy/Madelaine

ing arrived at from a careful analysis of the film itself. It follows that such a use is minor, incidental, and never necessary, it merely accords the satisfaction of confirmation. Thus Hitchcock's celebrated (and frequently reiterated) anecdote about his mock-incarceration, as a child, in a police cell (clearly an incident or fantasy of almost traumatic significance for him) has a clear if limited usefulness and interest in relation to my reading of *Blackmail*, though the anecdote was neither the source nor the conclusion of that reading. Or I find it

pal trajectory) or the Lacanian (the entry into the Symbolic), it is clear that we are inevitably subjected to an inexorable socialization whose (largely unconscious) purpose is to construct us as secure subjects within the dominant ideological norms. Yet it is also clear that the socialization process doesn't entirely work (if it did, we couldn't become aware of it as such, because all alternatives and all resistances would be "successfully" repressed). Many, arguably all, human individuals within our culture set up an instinctive resistance to

it in many forms, on different levels, and to greatly varying degrees, the resistance testifying to the fact that we are never "merely" ideological subjects or capable of being fully explained by such concepts. The socialization process, the perception that it begins at birth, the human individual's resistance to it, and the results of the struggle, were brilliantly encapsulated by Blake about two hundred years ago in his brief *Infant Sorrow*, a poem of which every phrase deserved pondering:

Infant Sorrow

My mother groan'd, my father wept,
Into the dangerous world I leapt;
Helpless, naked, piping loud,
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my father's hands,
Striving against my swaddling-bands,
Bound and weary, I thought best
To sulk upon my mother's breast.

It is doubtless too simple to say that when the resistance becomes conscious (and healthy) it manifests itself as radicalism, and when it remains unconscious (and unhealthy) it manifests itself as neurosis: the relationship between the two (between conscious/unconscious, health/unhealth, radicalism/neurosis) is likely to be far more complicated and interpenetrating than such a formulation suggests. What, after all, are the forms of neurosis but a kind of incoherent, unformulated radical protest? The meeting of psychoanalytical theory and concepts of ideology suggests that every human being in our culture is a battleground on which is fought, at both conscious and unconscious levels — always in a different form, always with a different outcome, the variations being infinite — the struggle between the forces of repression and the urge to liberation, the struggle in microcosm that we see being waged in the outside world of politics, national, international, sexual.

It can certainly be claimed that Hitchcock's work manifests this resistance to an extreme degree and in highly idiosyncratic ("personal") ways, with the result that the dominant ideological structures — especially those governing gender construction and gender relations — are repeatedly exposed, called into question, or ruptured. Many of the films therefore offer themselves very readily for appropriation as radical texts. It also needs to be said that the resistance should not be attributed exclusively to the workings of the unconscious, to impulses of which the

artist has no awareness: it is manifested on all levels and is as much an attribute of intelligence and control as of repressed psychic drives.

4. Narrative patterns/Generic conventions. Like Shakespeare, Hitchcock invented neither his medium nor the genres that had developed within it (also like Shakespeare, he significantly explored and extended the potentialities of both). No artist starts from scratch, there can be no absolute new beginning, no *tabula rasa*. The Romantic-idealist craving for absolute, mystically inspired 'originality' found its ironic apotheosis, disguised as the ultimate in historical materialism, in Godard's repeated call, desperate and barren, for a "return to zero," a call already countered by Trotsky almost half a century earlier:

The main task of the proletarian intelligentsia in the immediate future is not the abstract formation of a new culture regardless of the absence of a basis for it, but definite culture-bearing, that is, a systematic, planful and, of course, critical imparting to the backward masses of the essential elements of the culture which already exists. (*Literature and Revolution*, p. 123)

Whether on the level of the individual or that of the political collective (a collective is composed of individuals), significant art arises out of the artist's appropriation and transformation of forms, structures, conventions, that already exist. Like the artist, those forms, etc., are ideologically determined, though, again, not in any simple, absolute or exclusive way: like the individual, they exhibit, on inspection, the principles of resistance, conflict and contradiction. The process of appropriation and transformation — as opposed to mere inert reproduction — is of course crucial: if a given form (a Hollywood genre, for example) is structured ideologically, it follows that a transformation of that structure also affects its ideological meaning. Whether or not the appropriation and transformation are conscious or unconscious is immaterial: again, the term "intervention" comes to mind as a means of suggesting an active and dynamic involvement that may or may not operate partly on the level of intention.

What applies to forms, genres, conventions also applies to the wider principles of so-called "classical narrative." Again, the intervention of the individual artist can have a transformative effect on the narrative's overall movement and on the precise significance of its clo-

sure. It is true that the basics of narrative — the principle that these will correspond roughly to order/disturbance/restoration of (some form of) order — are likely to survive, and that some form of closure (however tentative or ambiguous) will assert itself. But these are not merely the principles of something called "classical narrative" or the "classical realist text," they are the principles of storytelling itself. It is time we resisted the temporarily pervasive notion that closure is a sort of bourgeois wish-fulfillment, particularly exemplified by the 19th-century novel and the Hollywood film. I cannot think of a single folktale, legend, or myth that does not exhibit the principle of closure (if such exist they must be very rare); it is a characteristic of even the most primitive narratives. Tribal hunting rituals, in which one man dresses as a tiger while the others stalk him, appear invariably to culminate in the death of the "animal" in the interests of sympathetic magic. Crucial in reading the closure of a narrative are attitude and tone. If, in the Hollywood cinema, the privileged form of closure is the guaranteed union of the heterosexual couple, even a perfunctory glance at Hitchcock's American films will show how rare it is in his work that such a closure is presented convincingly, as the film's triumphant culmination, without irony or discord.

5. Signification/expression. The false opposition individual author/cultural production gets its logical extension in the equally false opposition between personal expression and signification. The "advanced" position was usefully summed up ("usefully" in the sense that its perversity and reductivism are inadvertently exposed) in a passage from Tom Ryall's review of Raymond Durnat's *The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock*, *Screen*, Summer 1975 (I have no reason to suppose that Ryall would stand by this today, and am not trying to "get at" him personally):

In those terms (i.e. the terms of "auteurist" criticism), the debate is about the director/auteur's management of his consciousness, and not about managing the problems of signification in the cinema. The latter orientation would depend upon recognizing that the work of the filmmaker uses materials (images/sounds) which are already charged with a multiplicity of meanings which can be underlined (remarked), or effectively suppressed by the filmmaker, and by a great many other factors. Accordingly, film-

makers succeed or fail depending upon their knowledge of signs and meaning in the cinema rather than their "genius" or "talent" or whatever.

Hitchcock, apparently, was simply a good student who mastered his signifiers, and this had nothing to do with any personal qualities (other than, presumably, application). One may well ask why, if Hitchcock's art consisted merely of learning and applying certain sets of preexistent signifiers, it is so distinctive, so different from the works of others? But the passage concedes something by way of answer: Hitchcock can underline or effectively suppress any quantity of that "multiplicity of meanings" with which the materials (images/sounds) are already charged. What is conceded here is in fact the vacuity of the entire either/or opposition on which the passage is structured. It is but a short step from conceding Hitchcock's ability to underline and effectively suppress meanings to arguing that he is also able, out of his materials, effectively to construct them. He also, of course, constructed the particular images and sounds that constitute his "materials," out of the vast range of options available to him within the culture and within the limitations of commercial cinema. There is no realistic opposition between the notion that meanings are culturally determined and the notion of personal cinema.

The demolition of the author is necessary and central to a wider operation, the demolition of art. For without artists there is no art — only various configurations of signifiers awaiting deconstruction. The experiences for which one used to go to art — experiences inextricably bound up with concepts such as intelligence, sensibility, complexity, a sense of value — have all been declared invalid. They were, apparently, the exclusive preserve of the bourgeoisie, an aspect of bourgeois ideology, and anyway an illusion: if there are no artists, how can we attribute intelligence or sensibility to them? The notion of value — that the ultimate aim of criticism might be the establishment of (provisional) value judgments — is regarded as particularly reprehensible. If what we used to call works of art are mere ideological constructions, culturally determined, produced out of various combinations of codes, systems, and signifiers, then there is no point in choosing between them. All we need do is disassemble them to see how the mechanisms work — or, more commonly, to prove once again that the

mechanisms work in exactly the ways we predicted. Further, to attempt to develop a mature and responsible sense of value by prolonged attention to works of art is apparently an undertaking that smacks of elitism. I have never quite understood why: Is any human endeavour that requires sustained effort and long experience elitist? — is it elitist to be good at football, physics or mathematics? And how comes it, then, that the achievement of the lofty pinnacles of "deconstruction" and Lacanian psychoanalysis is somehow *not* elitist? Why a Marxist interested in the arts should not strive to develop a sense of value continues to elude me.

In fact, the whole either/or attitude of the semiotics/structuralist movement is based on a massive misapprehension. None of the valid achievements of that movement has rendered obsolete what T.S. Eliot called "the common pursuit of true judgement": indeed, what the most valuable of those achievements have done is to strengthen and more clearly define (and partly redefine) the criteria upon which that "common pursuit" can effectively be undertaken. It is important, if we are to pursue responsible value judgements, to develop a sense of how classical narrative works, what are its constraints and limitations, to what degree its "rules" (which can always be bent or broken) are determined by the patriarchal construction of gender differentiation. It is crucial to develop a concept of ideology, and of ideological contradiction, of the ways in which ideology functions as a force of repression — and hence of the forces it strives to repress that struggle against it. This will certainly affect our sense of value (which will be very different from T. S. Eliot's), in some ways transforming it; but there is no reason to suppose that the critical drive through analysis to evaluation has been discredited or rendered obsolete.

A NOTE ON "DECONSTRUCTION"

There was just a piece in the *New York Times Magazine* — something about the Yale critics. There's a big movement afoot there, and I can't begin to explain it — they're called deconstructionists. . . . I saw a woman pick a carrot out of the gutter on Columbus Avenue where now the rents for a store are twelve, fifteen thousand dollars a month. You know, money is flowing on that street, and here is this woman

picking a filthy carrot out of the gutter in front of a Korean vegetable store. It's very peculiar — society is so hard to describe. (Arthur Penn, interviewed in *CineAction* 5)

What went wrong? — how was the political impetus of the late '60s/early '70s lost, that manifested itself so strikingly in the field of film study? Basically, times changed, the revolution never happened: it is difficult to nurture a radical voice within a culture that doesn't want to listen to it, or where it is attended to only by a small, self-enclosed elite provided it wraps itself up in a more or less esoteric academic discourse. But one can be more specific: the cultural change itself — the shift from protest to recuperation — perhaps was responsible for certain choices that have determined the progress of film theory: choices of who and what should be the major influences. Semiotics/structuralism had (perhaps still has — one mustn't discount the possibility) great political potential. It provided tools that could be, and up to a point have been, used politically. One must insist upon a crucial distinction between using semiotics/structuralism as a set of political weapons and surrendering to it as an all-embracing system. The latter was the choice that was made, by and large, and it led to further choices that seem progressively disastrous: the adoption of the later Barthes, Lacan and "deconstruction."

Barthes' earlier work (*Mythologies*, *S/Z*) had and retains its political usefulness, though the danger signals were already there, pointing to the possible retreat into a new aestheticism that his later work on the whole enacts. Lacan's pernicious essentialism might be compared to that of the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis, the options it assigns women being scarcely less ignominious: they can either resign themselves to the subordinate place in the patriarchal Symbolic, or become psychotic. The repeated feminist attempts to appropriate Lacan seem as perverse as if the Jews had tried to appropriate the tenets of Nazism, or gays today tried to appropriate the fundamentalism of Jerry Falwell. Of course, if you are led to believe that Lacan — or Hitler, or Falwell — embodies "the truth," you can't very well do anything else. This phenomenon is sometimes given the name "self-oppression."

Semiotics offered to lead us to the Promised Land. As far as I can see we



Joan Fontaine and Cary Grant: *Suspicion*

are still in the wilderness, in terms of social practicalities. The wilderness has a new name every few months. The last I heard it was called "deconstruction." Like semiotics, deconstruction can of course be used as a political tool, and this seems to be what Derrida himself intended. But to appropriate it thus is to violate its basic premise: as language itself is slippery and unstable, every text can be deconstructed: every piece of knitting has a dropped stitch somewhere, and if you find the right place and pull, the whole thing will come undone and we'll end up with a big jumble of wool on the floor. Here of course politics vanishes altogether: if every text can be deconstructed, then it

makes no real difference whether you choose to deconstruct conservative texts or radical ones, *Mein Kampf* or *Das Kapital*: the choice is merely arbitrary. Nothing ultimately means anything and nothing ultimately matters. It's the perfect gift for academics in the '80s, though something of a dead end. When you've demonstrated that every text can be deconstructed, it becomes fruitless to deconstruct more and more. You can, of course, deconstruct the deconstruction, then deconstruct the deconstruction of the deconstruction: the babushka-doll of contemporary aesthetics. Instead of the Promised Land we're left with Peer Gynt and his onion. Meanwhile, old women are still bending down

to retrieve carrots from gutters all over the world, and the nuclear power is building in preparation for the holocaust, deliberate or accidental. We academics, of course, can change things very little, but we can at least try to be ready in position when the next cultural upheaval produces the next wave of popular radicalism. There are widespread rumors now that the student protest is once again beginning to mobilize — centered on the anti-nuclear movement and the various enormities of Reaganism. If and when the time comes, I hope we shall be in the forefront rather than sitting in a back room deconstructing one another's texts.

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FILM

AUTHORSHIP:

THE PREMATURE

In spite of the wide range of meanings of "author" within and beyond film theories it is often assumed that we know pretty well what constitutes an authorship approach to critical practice and that its products in criticism are easy to spot. You might say that it has its promotional counterpart in "Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*" and that some of

its discomforts are registered by "Neil Simon's *The Heartbreak Kid*. An Elaine May Film."

BURIAL

It would be less easy to state the propositions implicit in various authorship approaches. Possibly they would rest on a common understanding that the director's work is a determining factor for the qualities and meanings of most, or most of the good, films. That is a basis of much of my own work. Still, I do not call myself an *auteurist* and I can be tetchy when others do. I think it is necessary to observe a distinction between *auteurism* and other practices of director-centered criticism. *Auteurism* and *auteur* theories declare their descent from the great polemic initiative of Andrew Sarris and his transformation of the "*politique des auteurs*" from *Cahiers du Cinéma*. To my mind *auteurisms* are defined by a common feature which

is also a crucial error: their exaggerated concern with the continuities and coherence across the body of a director's work. This feature is assumed in, and thereby distorts, most attempts at theoretical discussion of the director's role and its consequences for criticism. The emphasis on repetition (the "author-code" traced from film to film) is what marks off versions of *auteurism* and *auteur* theory from other views of cinema which acknowledge and celebrate the central creative role of the director. *Auteurism* does not just observe or welcome continuity from film to film; it insists on continuity.

It is understandable that *auteurism* was born into this error. It emerged from a desire to confront and overturn an accepted view of (particularly) Hollywood movies as machine-made in style and either empty or baleful in content. In its Anglo-American versions it had to challenge assertions like the following: that the name of Vincente Minnelli could usefully serve to evoke the second-rate studio product — the film about which it would be silly to be thoughtful; that it would be frivolously eccentric to offer *Vertigo* as one of the great achievements of its year, and that a film's content could be cleanly equated with its plot-subject.¹

That was the context into which claims for the quality and individuality of, say *Psycho* and *Written on the Wind* had to be entered, and it is just possible that without the momentary plausibility of *auteur* theory the critical victories over "taking Hollywood seriously" would not have been won.

There were some powerful blocks to be removed. One of them was formed by the combination of the notion that "art . . . can only be the expression of the experience and vision of a single man, the creative artist"² with an entrenched and preferred view of the director's role in Hollywood that bore little relation to actuality. That view generalised the conditions of work of the director of a Monogram serial; it

By V.F. Perkins

ignored the great differences in production circumstance from film to film; it yielded the image of a director who functioned only during the period of principal photography and was thus excluded from the screenplay, casting and major design as well as from scoring, cutting and sound editing at the end. An assumed knowledge of the production acted as the guarantee of the "critical" perception of Hollywood's inferiority.

Perhaps more crucially there was no established or developed practice of what we now understand as textual analysis in film. An appreciative interest in the detail of the realisation of a film by Hitchcock or Sirk was incomprehensible; it could be received only as a dilettantist preference for decorative form over substantial content, and dismissed as a conception of film art that involved "shoving bits of style up the crevasses of the plots."¹

Evidence in support of the theory that authorship was possible under Hollywood conditions of production had to be offered to a readership unlikely to be convinced by argument from style; constructed, too, by critics under-equipped with models or resources for stylistic discussion. Instead a demonstration of authorship that did not depend upon the detailed articulation of form was derived from the continuities of theme and viewpoint across the body of a director's work. This evidence was all the more useful for being nearly statistical. It indicated the director's name as the variable associated with differences in theme and motif between otherwise similarly constituted movies; it could be pursued to reveal those same themes and motifs as characteristic of that director in films that embraced a range of genres, collaborations and production circumstances.

Identified in these ways the film director could become the *auteur*, in a coinage devised by Andrew Sarris both to acknowledge the French sources of the argument and to distinguish the film author from the authors of literary works and screenplays. The *auteur* was successfully entered in evidence against the belief in a Hollywood where the director was a mere functionary more or less effectively processing material imposed by the studios, producers, writers and stars.

So far so good, but on the verge of a breakdown. When the "*auteur*" was produced on the basis of recurrence, an observation about authors — that their works often display striking continuities and coherent development — was trans-

formed into a test of authorship, a qualification for author-status. The material invoked as a demonstration of authorship sidled into use as a definition of authorship. Thus Sarris offered as the "second premise of the *auteur* theory . . . the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value."⁴

Almost thirty years later it is not difficult to refine Sarris's formulation so as to hold on to what's important in this insight, as in "the achievement of eloquence and coherent viewpoint through direction is a major source of value."⁵ But Sarris continued: "Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurring characteristics of style which serve as his signature." This, which offers itself merely as an expansion of the first claim, shifts the focus from the single film — which might be valued for the "personality" of its direction — to the group; and it carries the notion of value in its slide, making "recurring characteristics of style" a quasi-aesthetic requirement.

This slippage recurred often in Sarris's *auteurism*, as here in his later essay, "Toward a theory of film history":

"The *auteur* critic is obsessed with the wholeness of art and the artist. He looks at a film as a whole, a director as a whole. The parts, however entertaining individually, must cohere meaningfully."⁶

Here the requirement for coherence between the parts of a film is extended to become the more dubious demand for coherence between the various films that make up a director's career, as if the two modes of coherence were, if not identical, closely related. The centrality given to propositions of this kind separated *auteurism* from other modes of understanding of the possibilities of authorship in film.

In advancing his "pattern theory"⁷ Sarris knew, of course, that while the critic may use the director's repetitions to prove or identify authorship, repetition can not be what the director uses to achieve authorship.

But then Sarris knew a great deal that he could accommodate only on the margins of his theoretical statements. He knew, for instance, that his concept of the *auteur* depended on aesthetic assumptions and critical values that he had not been able to integrate, and that authorship can not be offered as a "criterion of value" if it is no more than a perception of resemblance between films. He shows this in the way that he offers his patterns and recurrences now in terms of themes and motifs, now in terms of quality:

" 'That was a good movie,' the critic observes. 'Who directed it?' When the same answer is given over and over again, a pattern of performance emerges."⁸

At issue here is the manner in which *auteurism* relates two distinct sets of propositions and observations. The first set concerns ways in which the director's work may be crucial for the achievement within the single film of values like economy, unity, eloquence, subtlety, depth and vigour. This is the point at which *auteurism* has things to say about the connection between the good film and good direction. The second set of perceptions and arguments is about recurrent themes in a director's films considered as a series. This is the point at which *auteurism* has things to say about good direction and the director's involvement with themes, viewpoints and methods of sufficient personal significance to carry over from film to film.

Sarris's *auteurism* was preferable to its successors because it acknowledged and tried to incorporate the issue of quality. In later formulations that issue was repressed. At the same time the insistence on repetition grew so that what had been given an exaggerated role within Sarris's theory was offered as the theory itself.

When Peter Wollen attempted to accommodate *auteurism* to structuralism in his 1969 "Signs and Meaning in the Cinema"⁹ repeating patterns were all; anything else was "irrelevant . . . non-pertinent . . . secondary, contingent, to be discarded" since beyond the identification of recurrent structure nothing was accessible to criticism: "we can merely record our momentary and subjective impressions."¹⁰ Wollen offered one of the most emphatic but weird statements of the *auteurist* claim that you can not understand one of a director's films until you've seen them all: "it is only the analysis of the whole *corpus* which permits the moment of synthesis when the critic returns to the individual film."¹¹

A problem with this view is that it makes the production of its desired object impossible. If perceptions within the single film have no critical value it is not sensible to aggregate them across films, so you can not get started. You need some ground for the claim that a feature is pertinent in one film before it becomes interesting that it is repeated, and before it becomes observable that it is varied, in another. Wollen's method accepted as critical data only such "oppositions" as those between wilderness and garden, nomad and settler,

book and gun. While they can be used with extraordinary richness these are commonplaces of our culture and their use, far from being specific to a director or a genre, is by no means specific even to the movies. The mere presence of these "oppositions" in a film does not declare their pertinence, and no more does the trick of binarism or the posture of dialectic which favours "oppositions" over tensions, conflicts or contrasts.

Any aspect of image and sound, and any feature of the world that can be presented audio-visually, is available for expressive use. Thus walking and riding can be conceived as oppositions, and their difference is available for shaped presentations at various levels of prominence. It might be the barest indicator of a difference in energy, wealth or status. But in *The Magnificent Ambersons* walking and riding (as well as different kinds of riding, in carriage/sleigh and automobile) are systematically in play from the start in car-borne Eugene's unsuccessful wooing of Isobel, out walking with Wilbur and the dog. Later the two great long-take sequences that track Lucy's journeys with George down Main Street draw on the difference for contrast and emotional colour: as a pedestrian in the second Lucy has an independence from George not available to her, as his passenger, in the first.

Then again, in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* there is a pronounced though not absolute patterning of Lisa's walking alone against her riding in a carriage with a man, a patterning that is strongly relevant to the issue of her freedom. But if it were not relevant to some issue in the film it would hardly count as either an opposition or a pattern. It would simply be unstartling data on occurrences of locomotion in old Vienna.

Welles' and Ophüls' use of walking/riding as a motif can be observed in these films without reference to any question of recurrence. The relevance of recurrence will be something to be pondered in relation to views of *Liebelei*, say, or *The Reckless Moment*. How far it is significant will depend not on the number but on the character and centrality of its uses. You could say that the opening of *Touch of Evil* was founded on the opposition of walking (Mike and Susie Vargas) and riding (Linneker, the woman, the bomb, perhaps the camera). Formally the contrast is important for its contribution to the shifting rhythms of the shot. But is it a founding motif or rather a local device for the exposition

of other more significant themes — like the interweaving of the random and the determined? If we can derive any help from a comparison with *The Magnificent Ambersons* we should take it, but the question will need to be pursued as one about *Touch of Evil*. Without a (provisional, as always) resolution there, the issue is not available for setting into an overview of Welles' work.

Wollen seemed to claim that discussing a pattern found across a number of films was more secure than discussing a pattern found within one. The necessity for this claim arises from three aspects of his "structuralist" *auteurism*: its confusion over value, its picture of intention, and its rejection of collaboration.

AUTHORSHIP AND EXCELLENCE

Wollen's account offered no explanation of the coincidence by which the *auteurs* he mainly discussed appeared in his "Pantheon" of directors, among the ten best in the American Cinema. But it is clear that he wanted to erect a peculiar separation between questions of value and questions about authorship. Thus John Ford is "a great artist, beyond being simply an undoubted *auteur*"¹² and "there is no doubt that the greatest films will be not simply *auteur* films but marvelous expressively and stylistically as well."¹³ I take it that they had to be "marvelous as well" because *auteur* status was entirely a matter of repetition, and thus not eligible as a component of greatness. In Wollen's context the "*auteur* film" had to mean something like "an instance of the repeating pattern identifying the *auteur*." Offering that as a necessary condition of greatness showed the same kind of confusion as the uncertain location of the "richness" valued in John Ford's work¹⁴; in the individual film or in the relations between the films comprising his body of work.

I hope it is clear that the problem was not that questions of value were allowed an incoherent presence but that a doomed and distorting attempt was made to exclude them from the argument. The term "author" when used of a film director is almost inevitably a term of acclaim; it is an honorific title — like "artist" — at least as much as it is description. To speak of the film author, then, and to deny evaluation will most often be to invite confusion. Similarly it is likely that a coherent presentation of authorship would need to

state how authorship is recognised (as achievement) in the single film before going on to show how it may be observed (as recurrence and development) in bodies of work.

The authorship discussion sets a context in which to ask what characterises a director is to ask what is characteristic of his best work. What a director does well is at least as important as what he does often. That is a matter of skill, certainly, but one that goes beyond skill to embrace such values as eloquence, subtlety, vividness and intensity. Adequately to describe a director's authorship involves an exposition of these and other qualities. A characterisation of Hitchcock could not sensibly ignore his brilliance with scenes and moments centred on attempted concealment and threatened exposure, including a dazzling stream of variations on the theme, fear of giving oneself away. Another feature — and one which well illustrates the possibility of a fusion — form and content — is his skill in opening up gaps between the surface meaning of an image and the other meanings offered to the spectator through the structure of understandings that the film has built. Often this takes the form of a contradiction between what characters say, and what we understand by their saying it — but the saying need not be in words.

One of many such moments in *Notorious* comes just after counter-spy Alicia (Ingrid Bergman) has stolen the key to the forbidden wine-cellar from the key-ring belonging to her Nazi husband Alex (Claude Rains). This is on the night of the party at which Alex means to introduce his bride to Rio society and Alicia means to introduce her morbidly guarded lover and Secret Service contact Devlin (Cary Grant) to the wine-cellar. Alex emerges from the bathroom as his wife moves away from the dressing table with key in hand. He asks her for forgiveness for his expressions of jealousy over Devlin and takes her hand to plant in its palm a formal kiss — a courteous mask on the passion that we know he feels, and, as a mask, a measure of his uncertainty. (He can never quite believe his luck in having Alicia fall for him. Poor Alex.) This gives way to Alicia's gesture of passion as she throws her arms around him in a longing embrace — and thus forestalls his discovery of the purloined key in her other hand. Alex's formality denies passion, Alicia's impulsiveness denies calculation; but we are shown (and shown that we are shown) the formality, the passion, the convincing enactment of impulse, and the calculation.

As a structure of concealments by the characters and revelations by the film this scene is representative Hitchcock — that is, representative of pleasures and insights regularly offered by Hitchcock's best work.¹⁵ The particular brilliance of the scene is its discovery of the means to embody its themes in a concentrated, clear and forceful image. We see Alicia pretend passion as a cover for her deception of Alex. The assertion of commitment and the act of betrayal are fused into one vivid moment. But more than that, the moment in part "explains" the absent Devlin, because the image that Alicia presents to us here is the image of Devlin's panic. This is the "honeymoon scene," the scene from the honeymoon that we didn't see, where Alicia proved her aptitude for duplicity in love. A man who allowed himself to love such a woman might know only that her desire was plausible,

never that it was real. (And Devlin is a man to whom such a doubt is, shall we say, paralyzing. It robs him, for instance, of the power of speech.)

A theme or conflict arrestingly presented in a moment of film, like this, cues us to notice its re-emergence and development elsewhere. The material becomes a motif through the quality of the presentation. We would not observe as a recurrent opposition some contrast that appeared as inert data on no matter how many occasions. All directors — it might be in the nature of the medium — are dealing all the time with oppositions between stillness and movement. It is not possible for these features of the image to be dramatically irrelevant. But in Ophüls' work movement is so constantly manifest or implied that instances of stillness — often as paralysis, sometimes as hesitation — can be extraordinarily charged. Think of the

meeting in the snow in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* and the suspended moments when the camera moves in, with Stefan, approaching a Lisa immobilised by joy and longing. Think of the urgency, in *Lola Montes*, of "Don't move!" as various men attempt what is finally achieved, the halting of Lola's restless explorations.

Or think of Ford and the end of *My Darling Clementine* where movement (Earp's) and the fixity (Clementine's) give the sense of a parting — rather than recording the bald fact of it — by showing the one who leaves from a viewpoint matched to that of the one who remains: this image is of Earp going and of Clementine being left behind, rather than of Clementine staying. A view of Ford's authorship focused on a tension between settlement and wandering derives from the force of this imagery, and the similar force of departures, sep-



Linda Darnell and Henry Fonda in Ford's *My Darling Clementine*

arations and homecomings in other Ford movies. Most films include a fair amount of coming and going. Plenty of directors supply "photographs of people leaving." The eloquence which constitutes the going and staying as a motif is a product not of repetition but of mastery. (One might guess that the mastery has its source in emotional commitment but those whom the thought upsets are at liberty to ignore it.)

To identify an opposition as a motif is to offer a judgement that the film gives it weight and significance. One part of this involves the recognition of a rhetoric; but since — Alicia's lesson — any set of gestures is available for purposes of fraud, another part involves an acknowledgement of the rhetoric as fitting and earned.¹⁶ The issue of the expressive and the genuine can not be sidelined while we determine authorship. Wanting a value-free *auteurism* is like wanting one's ice a bit warmer.

Structuralised *auteurism* as "a principle of method which provides a basis for a more scientific form of criticism than has existed hitherto" was radically incoherent about value — and used a deal of bluster to cover itself. Thus Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, having scored a point-blank bull's eye against the notion that "every film that is a *film d'auteur* is good, and every film that is not is bad," went on to urge analysis organised round the basic fact of authorship, a quest for the "defining characteristics of an author's work."¹⁷ But was this author simply the director, any director? Obscured here was the question whether all films display the patterns characteristic of their directors. If only some do that would indicate a special quality in the director's work and point to authorship as an achievement rather than a plain fact.

The flight from evaluation is all the more strange in view of the sources of *auteurism*. One of the functions of constancies of theme and style had been to establish not just the individuality of the *auteur's* work but also its integrity and sincerity. That was in response to the prevailing image of the Hollywood director as sometimes gifted but always tarnished: his talents and vision compromised, sold out or prostituted in the cause of giving the industry what it wanted.

AUTHORSHIP AND INTENTION

Wollen's first presentation of his *auteur* theory shifted fluently between outlining procedures for

the identification of *auteurs* and — something else altogether — presenting considerations relevant to the possibility of directorial authorship in the cinema. Despite later disclaimers, much of the chapter would make no sense divorced from a project to explain why direction can confer authorship (in material on composition and performance) and how the director's authorship can be submerged (in references to structures of finance and production).

One way of understanding Wollen's *auteurism* here is as a means of recovering contact with the director's intentions, obscured and confused as their expression is by the impact of commerce and collaboration. In major respects Wollen conceded the anti-Hollywood case. Only through decipherment could the director's intentions be discerned in films which were indeed compromised by studio control, censorship, unsympathetic collaborators and so forth. The image of the palimpsest¹⁸ and the concept of "noise" were invoked similarly. Where a Kael might assert that noise is all you get from Hollywood movies Wollen seemed to offer *auteurism* as a filter to clear our access to the *auteur's* film.

Wollen chose Hawks and Ford as his main examples, oddly since studio interference was seldom a great problem for either of them. Indeed, the chapter gave no examples at all of the workings of critical noise-removal. But it is clear that Wollen's arguments drew on a controlling model of authorial intention that was nowhere articulated or examined.¹⁹ In this model the design of a movie is established first of all in the author's mind. The purpose of filmmaking is to reproduce a set of preformed mental images, and the process is the more or less compromised realisation of these images on celluloid. The key question then is whether the originating mind is the director's or — the only alternative envisaged — the screen-writer's. The relevance of "composition and performance" is that Wollen saw only two sources for the film's design, "the original screenplay or novel" and "the mind . . . of the *auteur*."²⁰ So long as you forget what films are actually like, either of these can be conceived as the place where the film is composed. And structuralised *auteurism* can become a method of stimulating one's imagination of what a director's films would be if, being more completely authored, they corresponded more closely to the films composed in his mind.

AUTHORSHIP AND COLLABORATION

This view of intention omits the process of film-making with its opportunities for revision, development and discovery of intentions. In Wollen's version of authorship the subject that the director treats derives solely from an original written source. Actors, landscapes, settings, gestures, intonations, movements, qualities of light, faces, dress and props were excluded from consideration. They belonged to "execution" and "performance" and were not entertained as subjects that might engage a director's constructive interest and become subjects of the film. That reflects a bad *auteurist* habit of regarding anything not invented by the director as some kind of threat to his authorship. Even Sarris, close to his brilliant suggestion that we see direction as "a very strenuous form of contemplation" offered the assumption that the given personalities of the Marx Brothers must detract from McCarey's authorship of *Duck Soup*.²¹

For Wollen the process of film-making was the site only of compromise, noise, "impoverishment and confusion."²² The important possibility excluded here is that authorship of movies may be achieved not despite but in and through collaboration. To take an extreme instance, Sternberg's authorship largely consists in his explorations of Marlene Dietrich and is not at all diminished by the fact that she was his discovery rather than his invention. Who would suggest that we get more of Hawks or McCarey or Hitchcock if we remove Cary Grant from *Monkey Business*, or *The Awful Truth* or *Notorious*? A director unable to make use of the individuality, the personal skills and attributes of his collaborators is likely to be to that extent, or on those occasions, a poor director.

Elia Kazan is interesting on this: "I think there should be collaboration, but under my thumb! I think people should collaborate with me."²³ Then, on *East of Eden* and James Dean: "His face was wonderful and very painful . . . but I realised there was great value in his body . . . it had so much tension in it . . . Dean had a very vivid body; and I did play a lot with it in long shots . . . Julie Harris was wonderful. I wanted to make it so that her face, what's in her face, is the key to the picture . . . Her face is the most compassionate face of any girl I've ever seen, and I stressed it. I contrasted her face and (Raymond) Massey's which was a piece of wood."²⁴

The director's authorship can not be



Hawks' *Monkey Business*

produced by eliminating the results of collaboration. Either film direction allows modes of collaboration that can yield authorship or the concept of authorship is inappropriate. An authorship theory must find room for processes which may enable the director to take responsibility for discoveries, incorporating them into the film's intention. It must allow for the possibility that a movie may be enriched, rather than impaired, by changes from an original concept — wherever that is located. It must allow for the fact that many directors establish their authorship by seeking enrichment and fostering change.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CRITIC

It is in the line of *auteurist* development that when Wollen abandoned the first statement of his theory he inflated yet further its dependence on repetition. In the revised edition of "Signs and Meaning in Cinema" his new Conclusion claimed to clarify but

in fact contradicted much of the first statement. In particular he moved to break the incriminating connection between the *auteur* and the notion of authorship. With a scattering of inverted commas the *auteur* became a pure critical construct whose existence lay entirely in patterns of repetition. Famously "Fuller or Hawks or Hitchcock, the directors, are quite separate from 'Fuller' or 'Hawks' or 'Hitchcock,' the structures named after them, and should not be methodologically confused."²⁵

Left to our own devices we might not have been in peril of mistaking a critical interpretation of a group of movies for either a human being or a professional function. That the divorce between John Ford and garden/wilderness etc. had to be so solemnised was the consequence of Wollen's having erected the *auteur* film as the film the critic makes: "Renoir once remarked that a director spends his whole life making one film: this film . . . it is the task of the critic to construct."²⁶ The use of "construct" here is a rhetoric, not a mere slip from

"imagine and describe." In a number of places Wollen invited us to confuse what a director makes for showing on a screen with the products of a critic in the medium of words. But because the structures of oppositions had by the time of the 1972 Conclusion lost any rational connection with the nature and purpose of a director's actions the director himself became a quite metaphysical entity, one that produced a structure in movies "through the force of his preoccupations."²⁷ Instead of confronting the problem of intention raised by the relation between the "*auteur* structure" and a director's choices and designs Wollen fell back on an immaterial force with all the explanatory power of an ectoplasm.

THE DEATH OF THE AUTEUR

Auteur theory ends here, reduced to a set of hints on how to construct an *auteur* without reference to a director's authorship. The *auteur* had

dwindled into a construct tagged with a director's "name" on unspecified grounds. There was a general and understandable reluctance to volunteer life support when even this whittled-down *auteur* succumbed to attack. The corpse was already headed for the boneyard when the Death of the Author was pronounced. But the Death of the Author says nothing about the continued usefulness of analogies between filmmakers and the writers of novels and poems. When the figure of the author was borrowed from literature, authorship there was not perceived to be in question: calling the director a film author signified that under conditions that make the achievement remarkable he had achieved the authority in his film that a novelist acquires by putting down his pen.

More importantly the death of the *auteur* is without the drastic consequences that some have imagined for the theory and practice of director-centred criticism. There has never been substantial connection between *auteur* theory and critical practice, even in places

where the theory was pronounced. Wollen's readings of Ford and Hawks were not products of his theory — the theory was too ramshackle to have any products. Rather the theoretical claims were sustained by their parasitic relation to a fresh, lively and suggestive reading of Ford's work and an occasionally amusing parody of Hawks'.

So I do not share the belief that "structural analysis of *auteurs* has produced important results."²⁸ And I deny that "the sustained and theoretically decisive critique of *auteurism*" (if it existed or could exist) would provide grounds for deploring the "persistent authorial discourse [which] runs through from publicity . . . even to academic discussion . . . where it is nominally barred."²⁹ If the authorship approach is inadequately theorised (as against what?), yet is used in the production of "evaluations and interpretations which are frequently impressively . . . perceptive"³⁰ that conjuncture might have more implications for the agenda of theory than for the practice of criticism.

The significant development of the notion of authorship in the cinema is not to be found in successive constructions of an *auteur* methodology. Currently *auteurism* seems to be credited with with achievements in criticism, while achievements in criticism are discounted because of the inadequacies of the *auteur* theory. There's symmetry in that but not justice or reason or profit. A side-effect of *auteurism* has been the creation of an author of straw as a distractingly easy target. Attacks on the *auteur* can be conducted as an auto-da-fé, useful in the suppression of those internal or external voices that would otherwise persist in raising problems about the director.

One remarkable passage in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* is that in which Peter Wollen mentioned and dismissed an *auteur* criticism stressing style and *mise en scène*.³¹ The manoeuvre was performed with a strange shiftiness corresponding I suppose to a desire to deny any route to a discourse on film authorship other than through the "structural approach." Certainly *mise en scène* was



Welles' *Touch of Evil*: Dietrich reads the cards

little considered in deciphering Hawks and John Ford. So let's return to the final images of *My Darling Clementine*. A prominent feature is a rough wooden fence that stretches out inconclusively into the landscape of Monument Valley, enclosing nothing. Fences were evidently an important resource to Ford; their expressive possibilities were explored in a range of films including *Drums along the Mohawk*, *Tobacco Road* and *Young Mr. Lincoln*. Here the fence is the last vestige of the town's impact on the terrain and it is associated with Clementine. She does not walk to its end and as a result she is held precariously within the town while Earp is seen with backgrounds of the open road and sky. The fence is taller than Clementine, its uprights reinforce the sense of her erectness — a certain strain in her poise — and its strong perspective helps stress the distance to the horizon. At the same time, being made of widely spaced, unmatched timber, it is heavy but insubstantial and already suggestive of its own decay. The fence helps to enclose Clementine firmly within a moment which is also fleeting.

Would Ford have been surprised to have been told that the fence was a significant element in his image? I think that is much harder to believe than that he would have roasted the assistant who failed to have the fence built, the carpenter who made it too neatly or the cameraman who offered to frame, light or focus the shots so as to de-emphasise its place in the image. We can assume that Ford well knew what place the fence would occupy at the distances and with the lights and lenses chosen. In deciding to print *those* takes and use *this* one, Ford was authorising the effects and meanings of the image, including those contributed by the fence. On the other hand he might not have been quick or willing to articulate in another medium, like speech, aspects of the meanings of what he had made in the medium of film. Pressed about what he intended he would have been entitled to point at the screen. There he could see as well as I could, or better, what the fences meant. He had no responsibility, however, for the results of my or any critic's or viewer's efforts to articulate some facets of its presence and meanings.

There is a further point here that I think has some bearing on the canvassed transfer of authority from the author to the reader. The film director is, like all creators, his work's first audience. He can try it out on himself and take it through a long series of

adjustments and refinements to get as close as he can to a work that satisfies him, that does what he wants it to do. One way of understanding the director's role is to see him checking and adjusting the elements of the film as each of them is taken to its point of registration so as to satisfy himself of the ways in which in their developing context they respond to an active reading. It's a scrutiny keyed to the question, "How does this moment play for a spectator who assumes that what's on the screen is precisely and in all its aspects a finished and authorised work?" I am not willing to suppose that Ford — or Hitchcock or John Sturges or Rudolph Mates — was a less alert, adept or responsive reader of films than any critic.

When a moment of film achieves the unlikely enchantment of unity where it is sustained and enriched by the stresses and tensions that could split it apart, we have every reason to suppose that the moment achieves the intentions of the person who gave it direction. The critic who claimed to perceive meanings that were "unconscious and unintended" would surely face an obligation to show how he came by his knowledge, and according to what picture of the intended and the conscious. It would be absurd to insist that the critic can construct, in words, an opposition such as between the nomadic and the settled that was inaccessible, in images, sounds and invented action, to the film maker. That would not be a death of the author but a license to critical vampirism. The logic that acknowledges powers of invention and construction in the reader can not withhold them from the author.

One thing more: a theory of film authorship might usefully set out to explain why so many of those directors who have achieved authority within a single film (through a structure of authored moments) turn out to have done so repeatedly — and often in strikingly coherent terms.¹²

NOTES

1. All these references are to Richard Roud, "The French Line" *Sight & Sound* Vol. 29, No. 4 Autumn, 1960, pp. 167-171, an article unusually sympathetic, for its time and place, to claims for Hollywood directors.
2. Ernest Lindgren, *The Art of Film* (Second edition, Allen & Unwin, G.B., 1963) p. 192
3. Pauline Kael, "Circles and Squares: Joys and Sarris" in John Stuart Katz (ed.) *Perspectives on the Study of Film* (Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1971) p. 148
4. Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962" in Katz p. 136

5. Changing Sarris's "criterion" to my "major source" is a way of indicating without debating an unease about the concept of an evaluative "criterion"
6. Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema* (Dutton, New York, 1968) p. 30
7. *ibid.* p. 34
8. *ibid.* p. 35
9. Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (3rd edition, Secker & Warburg, London, 1972) p. 104
10. *ibid.* p. 105
11. *ibid.* p. 104
12. *ibid.* p. 102
13. *ibid.* p. 113
14. *ibid.* p. 102
15. It is also representative that he so often fumbled courtroom scenes? They seem to me to provide the feeblest moments in *I Confess*, *The Wrong Man*, *Vertigo* and *Frenzy*.
16. The obverse of this is that the shame of the studio inserts in *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *My Darling Clementine* is not that Welles and Ford could never have made them but that they could have made them and retained them in their final cuts only through an extraordinary failure of judgement or control. In my experience Welles was never as crude as the Anne Baxter close-up in *Ambersons* and Ford seldom as clumsy as the kiss shot at the end of *Clementine*.
17. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Visconti*, (Secker & Warburg, London, 1967) p. 10
18. "Palimpsest . . . twice-used writing material, where partly erased early writing can be seen below more recent writing" *Penguin English Dictionary*, second edition, G.B., 1969
19. This model of intention has much in common with the one extensively derided in Wollen's 1972 Conclusion pp. 156-164.
20. Wollen, p. 113
21. Sarris, *American Cinema*, p. 37
22. Wollen, p. 105
23. Michel Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan* (Secker & Warburg, London, 1973) p. 37
24. *ibid.* p. 125-6
25. Wollen, p. 168
26. *ibid.* p. 104
27. *ibid.* p. 167
28. Edward Buscombe, "Ideas of authorship" in John Caughie (ed.) *Theories of Authorship* (RKP, London, 1981) p. 31
29. R. Lapsley & M. Westlake, *Film Theory: an introduction* (Manchester U.P., G.B., 1988) p. 127. The words "nominally barred" are accurately quoted.
30. John Caughie "Auteurism Introduction" in Caughie, p. 29
31. Wollen, p. 78-80
32. While I hope not to have committed plagiarism I am aware of this article's indebtedness — too pervasive to be specifically noted — to stimulus received from work by William Rothman and Stanley Cavell (especially his essay "A Matter of Meaning It" in his *Must We Mean What We Say?* Scribners, N.Y., 1969) and from George M. Wilson's *Narration in Light* (Johns Hopkins U.P., Baltimore, 1986).

TERENCE DAVIES

AN INTERVIEW

by Tony Williams

In 1969 Alan Lovell wrote a BFI seminar paper, "British Cinema: The Unknown Cinema," a title as true today as it was then. Although Britain has never had a national cinema comparable to Hollywood and France for reasons that Paul Swann and others have documented (see Swann, *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), there have often appeared intermittent alternative voices worthy of attention. This is especially so in the post 1979 period, an era which saw the contradictory emergence of Thatcherite totalitarianism and a rich period of independent cinema.

Like Derek Jarman, and black cinema collectives such as Sankofa, Davies's work has received support from the BFI Production Board and Channel Four. All these talents are attempting to articulate an alternative cinematic style in opposition to the dominant hegemonic voices of Hollywood and Britain's "realist-quality-art" tradition. Although the work that has emerged from the British independent sector is often problematic (see Alan Lovell's comments on Sankofa in *Screen*, Spring 1990), in many cases important cinematic voices have emerged to condemn the stifling economic, intellectual and cultural bankruptcy of Thatcherite oppression. Derek Jarman's *The Last of England* (1987) is one such stylistic exercise.

Serious work on British cinema is often hampered by excessive dismissals that are usually blind to the presence of contradictions within ideological and gendered representations. The work of Terence Davies is an interesting example. Familiar with key works of Hollywood and British cinema, Davies engages in an important anti-realist critique of major filmic representations that moves beyond the blind alleys of post-68 film theories frequently marring many British independent works. In his trilogy — *Children, Madonna and Child, and Death and Transfiguration* — Davies both presents the working-class family life characteristic of the British New Wave in an overpoweringly realistic manner and reveals the powerful gender structures responsible for the miserable lives of all participants. In this way, Davies's work avoids the misogyny that John Hill has found in the '60s kitchen sink films. The trilogy is a bleak depiction of guilt and torment within the life of a frustrated gay, Robert Tucker, whom society and religion allows no avenue of expression. It is a powerful indictment of the traumatic nature of normal family life, parallel to Alice Miller's findings. However, the trilogy's nature is overwhelmingly marred by an overemphasis upon classic Freudian masochistic structures allowing no alternative to emerge.

Davies' *Distant Voices, Still Lives* presents another family bearing the traumatic scars of patriarchal oppression. But its bleakness is mitigated by the presentation of an alternative utopian society, fragile, but yet present. Mother and daughters bind in song affirming temporary solidarity against an oppressive world. Davies' film is lighter and more complex than his preceding works. His output calls for the application of critical tools often absent in works on British cinema — psychoanalysis and gender — for the insights they give us into the traumatic mental conditioning of the family, still a reality in our current world of Reaganite-Bush and Thatcherite hegemony.

During a three week visit to Britain during 1989-90, I attempted to contact Terence Davies via the BFI Production Board. The day before my departure I received a phone message. He had been out of the country and had just returned and was willing for an interview. We arranged an 11:00 a.m. interview at a health food restaurant, Cranks, a half-way point between his home and the Victoria Station express to Gatwick Airport. My plane was to take off at 2:15! However, Davies arrived ten minutes early. We sat down to an interview. Terence Davies is a very gentle, creative, and mild-mannered man, co-operative in interviews, but often angry when remembering his father's patriarchal oppression and condescending attitudes of establishment producers. As this brief interview shows, he is knowledgeable, intelligent, as well as being one of the interesting voices to emerge in recent independent cinema.

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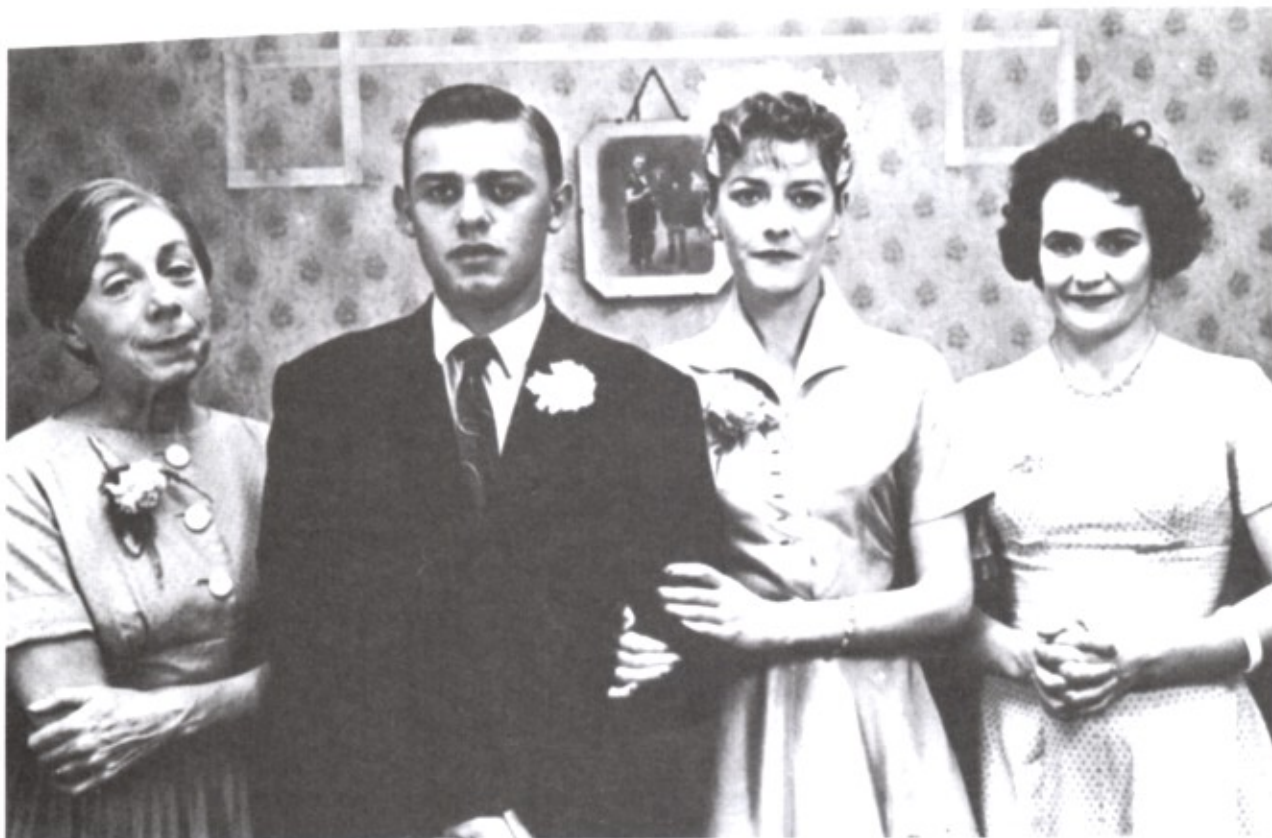
In 1969 Alan Lovell wrote a BFI seminar paper, "British Cinema: The Unknown Cinema," a title as true today as it was then. Although Britain has never had a national cinema comparable to Hollywood and France for reasons that Paul Swann and others have documented (see Swann, *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), there have often appeared intermittent alternative voices worthy of attention. This is especially so in the post 1979 period, an era which saw the contradictory emergence of Thatcherite totalitarianism and a rich period of independent cinema.

Like Derek Jarman, and black cinema collectives such as Sankofa, Davies's work has received support from the BFI Production Board and Channel Four. All these talents are attempting to articulate an alternative cinematic style in opposition to the dominant hegemonic voices of Hollywood and Britain's "realist-quality-art" tradition. Although the work that has emerged from the British independent sector is often problematic (see Alan Lovell's comments on Sankofa in *Screen*, Spring 1990), in many cases important cinematic voices have emerged to condemn the stifling economic, intellectual and cultural bankruptcy of Thatcherite oppression. Derek Jarman's *The Last of England* (1987) is one such stylistic exercise.

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The Family Portrait: *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives*

Did you consciously intend *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* to differ visually from the earlier kitchen-sink movies?

It wasn't a conscious decision. When I write, I write what I think and as I see it. Because of the way cinema has evolved in this country, it's basically a province of the middle classes. When you're from a working class background, you think that this is not proper film-making. I've never been to a university in my life. The earlier directors were all into actors, weren't they?

My films are not the result of any conscious theory. I wrote as I felt it. And I see visually. It was in no way conscious in terms of feeling that I would be different from this or that. It's how I felt. And if it felt right then I wrote it down. I do two drafts anyway. I don't do a storyboard. Everything's written down — every track, pan, dissolve, bit of dialogue — so that even after the first draft you could go and actually shoot the film. That's the way I've always done it. It was never conscious. This was how it felt to me.

You once spoke of *This Sporting Life* as coming close to capturing an essence of what working-class life was really like.

Only in the sense in which things in it are *en passant* such as the exterior shots of the houses. If you actually look at Britain then, even in the '60s Edgar Wallace thrillers, when they shot outside England, it looked so grim, like something out of Doré. What I liked about *This Sporting Life* was Rachel Roberts. I like very little else about it, certainly not Richard Harris doing his sub-Brando bit which he does very badly. There is a kind of feel of what it was like to go to a match on Saturday. Of course, I never went because I couldn't bear football. But my brothers did. So there is a specific sort of atmosphere about Saturdays. The film does capture a certain

something. But it's still the product of someone from the middle class slumming it. It's certainly not from someone of the working-class. If you listen to the accents they vary a great deal. Harris' accent wavers a great deal. You think, "Where were you brought up?" Certainly in Ireland, not in Yorkshire!

There's never been any film which has really done it — a film which is from a stage play, not a film at all — *Spring and Port Wine* has shots of workers coming out of a factory on a Friday night. That's really accurate because that's what people used to do. So it's seeing little bits of little films that you think, "Yes, that little scene captured just something, an echo of what it was like." But I can't think of any film that really captured exactly what it felt like to be working-class because working-class people didn't make movies. You weren't allowed to. You were told "You are going into a factory." Or, if you were bright enough you were told, "You were going to work in an office." That's what I was told.

In an earlier interview you spoke of learning a kind of dazed passivity from your mother and stated that a lot of working-class people come to terms with being suppressed. Naturally that happened in your own personal situation. But don't you think that your films exhibit a fundamental pessimism in which there is no possibility of personal change or anybody fighting back against their situation? There seems to be no positive alternative avenue.

I think my films are all pessimistic, especially the trilogy. In real life it was infinitely much worse than that. I really did believe. I was a devout Catholic. I was an idiot. I must have had a screw loose. But I did believe. And if you do believe then you are totally damned. You have this thing called a

soul which is in danger. And because you are attracted to other members of the same sex — this is not touched upon in the Catholic dogma so it must be beyond the pale. The implication is direct and simple. There is one form of sexuality and that's it. So I prayed until my knees were raw, literally raw. No succor came. That was the nadir of my life. I really did touch bottom. So what I felt in real life was infinitely worse than the trilogy. God knows that's miserable enough!

I suppose I don't think you can change. Obviously we change naturally, whether we like it or not as we get older. And that changes our perspectives. But I don't think you can ever escape things done to you when you were vulnerable. When you're a child you are totally at the mercy of other people, especially adults. If they do things to you which are incomprehensible, what you do is think that the world is like that. It's only when my father died and I went into other people's homes that I discovered that things were different. My best friend was Albert Drake. His father was really gentle and nice. But otherwise you think that the world is against you because of something you've done. It must be because I'm so hateful. My father was like that. And I did wish him dead. He took two years to die. But when you're a child, you think that your wish is fulfilled and it's your fault. I'll be perfectly frank with you. I wanted him dead. Life was much better without him. But because it's like a Jesuit said, "Give me the child at seven and I will have the man," if you have gone through a trauma at that age then you never get over it. Also my mother had no money. So I had to sleep in the bed in which he died. So it was very traumatic, especially when you're seven.

I don't think you ever get away from your past. You can't.

You may come to terms with it. That's something different. But you are the product of your past. You spend your life coming to terms with it. But whether you actually change? I don't think you do. I think you alter in certain ways. You're the product of what you have been and what people did to you especially if, like me, you are cursed with a very accurate memory. I remember injustices done to me when I was eight and a half which still burn inside me. I remember being accused of telling another boy to swear. I didn't. It wasn't me. But I was accused of it. I can't tell you how much that injustice burns inside of me even now. I never forget an injustice, ever. It's silly really because you can't go through life like that. Life's too short or too long.

I'm interested in your visual links between religion and sexuality. In Children, Robert exclaims "Jesus!" during fellatio. In Madonna and Child, you have similar sexual imagery. In Death and Transfiguration, young Robert's first confession follows his later adult sado-masochistic practices. Can you comment on these associations?

Well they are very close because when I realized I was gay — in those days you were called "queer" — I went to confession. I went to Mass. I was a model Catholic. Of course, I couldn't confess a sin that was eating away at me. I suddenly found that the more you repress something the greater the lust. And when you are between the ages of 16 and 22 — the sexual peak for men — if you suppress it, it will come out in another form, fantasy whatever. It didn't at the time. It was only afterwards when I thought, "Yes! I know this will work."



Angela Walsh, Lorraine Ashbourne and Debi Jones in: *Distant Voices, Still Lives*

Before he was ill my father was very big and muscular which I find attractive in other men. But ironically people like that are only attracted to other muscular men. So the religious imagery is so powerful anyway. I was imbued with it from the age of five till 22. Seventeen years is a long time. And you absorb those things. They're part of your skin. So it seemed to me that the association was an ideal thing. You can argue that the Catholic dogma hates sexuality because it circumscribes it. The two are in fact the same sides of the same coin. It seemed important to stress this powerful link. But, again, it wasn't a conscious thing when I tracked to the stations of the Cross. I *knew* it would work. I don't know why. But I knew it would work.

Mother and Child has very strong Madonna and Christ imagery. The picture of the madonna holding the crucified Christ appears behind Robert and his mother in church. When Robert fantasized death, the camera tilts above his coffin to reveal the same picture. In Distant Voices, the whole family prays before the madonna. Did you intend any critical statement concerning the mother's role in the family, particularly in inculcating a sacrificial martyr example?

No. It was much more modest than that. For me, the mother is the still point of the trilogy's turning world. She's very, very important to me. She's very important in our family because she just stuck it out for 25 years or so. She was the one constant. She was always there. I can't risk extrapolating because the Virgin Mary is the idea of the perfect mother. Inevitably, you're brought up with the cult of the Virgin in Catholic mythology. She just is the perfect woman. A lot of feminists would argue against this. Maybe it is wrong to elevate any woman to the ideal of the Virgin. Perhaps only men do it to their mother. I don't know what girls do to their fathers because I'm not a girl. But for me she is the most important person. She was the most important person to whom I cleaved — and still do. She has faults like everyone else has. But she's had so much courage. She decided that she would stick it out for the kids' sake. If it was me I wouldn't. I would have said, "Sorry, I can't take this any more." But she chose to do that. This may be a kind of sexism. But I don't think it is. I think women do endure. I don't think they should have to. But I think they do. They will see the best in people on the whole. It's very significant that several surveys have been done about what women find attractive in men. It's usually nothing physical such as men see in women. Women tend to go for those abstract qualities such as kindness or humor. It tells you a lot about the sexuality of women — of looking beyond what is physically there — sometimes to their own detriment as in the case of my own mum.

In Death and Transfiguration the nun appears twice. Since other interviews mention your interest in American cinema did you intend any conscious reference to the nun in Vertigo? Hitchcock was also affected by his early Jesuit upbringing.

No. I'd never seen *Vertigo* at the time although Hitchcock is one of my favorite directors. I think I saw it a year and a half after I'd finished the trilogy. It's not a film I like. I do find it very clumsy. The nun was simply there because she was there in my primary school. Although she never actually asked me that question, "Do you love God, Robert?" we were asked it in school. What can you say? You can't say, "I can't stand the sight of him." You've got to say, "Yes." They are all very prominent because of their habits. It's very stark and powerful. She's in there simply because the headmistress of my primary school was a nun. It's very simple really.

In using the opening overhead shot in Children, as well as one showing Robert and his mother celebrating Christmas in Death and Transfiguration, did you intend any idea of a God's eye view?

No. It was meant to represent the camera as omniscient narrator. Because it's a point of view you can't really have shots of scenes to which a person was not privy. The camera is on the level of narrator. You can only have that or a character's point of view.

The overhead shot in Death and Transfiguration reveals a very tender scene. It's almost like two lovers embracing. It's not overtly sexual but more like two lonely people embracing each other because they are all each one has.

That's probably true. Although I'm from a large family because there was a six or seven year age gap between me and my next brother I did feel very much like an only child. My mother and I were very close. So it felt like that. Even in a large family it was a special kind of relationship.

In Madonna and Child you begin a slow-tracking shot of Robert in his office to reveal the rest of the workers. After an intervening scene revealing his closet homosexuality, you return to the end scene of the previous shot and return to Robert reversing the tracking in a more closer shot. Was this intended to suggest Robert's entrapment in a very dull office job?

Yes. He was trapped there. We shot it in the office in which I had actually worked. But also, in terms of syntax, you've been away. So you have to change the angle of the returning track to give it more interest. The intention of the reverse track is to say, "Look folks. We're back!" It was nothing more simple than that. I hope that the way in which it was shot gave you the impression that it was a stultifying office, that he was never going to get out because that was how it felt. It was a syntactic thing.

Thanks for the clarification.

Because you make the film yourself you are often not aware of the sub-textual meaning and, in fact, you shouldn't be. That's other people's job. Not yours.

Madonna and Child has a very interesting visual association. The middle-aged Robert tenderly exclaims to his sleeping mother, "Oh Mum!" Then you cut to Robert's simulated fellatio with the tattooist. Then Robert wakes up from a nightmare. Was this meant as a masochistic pleasure-pain link?

It's very hard to answer this. What I wanted to get across was the fact that Robert's homosexuality was totally unfulfilled and violent which I think is true of a lot of gay relationships. It's a very predatory world and so depressing. It's OK for young, good-looking types. But I'm not young or good-looking. So what do you do? You can't practice what you feel because usually nobody is interested. So you have fantasies and nightmares, and dreams. They are essentially sadistic and cruel.

Some gay critics would disagree with your documentation of homosexuality's dark side. They would argue that the gay life style has more positive aspects.

This would be as untrue and banal as saying all heterosexual marriages are happy. We know they're not. I had exactly the same reaction from certain people in San Francisco. All of

them were very good-looking. But what if you're not like that and you live in a temperate climate where you are more restricted? What do you do then? I get very cross with such reactions because even if the trilogy is grim — and it is because it's my own personal point of view — if that is valid for one person, as it was with me, then it's valid. Plenty of people have come up to me and said, "I've seen my life on this screen!" So I knew it was true. It may not be true for everybody. But it's true for quite a number of people. I think this idea of, "We have to be positive," is just basically stupid because the best way to be positive is to be truthful. Life can be great if you're like that. But it can be equally awful if you're not. The only way a gay life style can come to maturity is by acknowledging that there are many people who hate being gay and are miserable, and I happen to be one of them. I know whereof I speak.

When the aged Robert dies at the end of Death and Transfiguration, whose voice sings, "You are the only boy in the world"?

Mother.

I thought so! So in a way it's a return to mother?

No. Not really. It's a surrender into the light. The last thing he hears is his mother's voice. That's basically what it is. It's surrender. I wanted it to be to the light. In a way it's my tiny bit of hope. And there's not a lot of hope in the film as you've seen. There's not many jokes either. That's what I wanted because there's something more positive about that somehow. I don't know why I just wanted him to surrender to the light.

I'm glad you mentioned jokes. That leads me to my next question. As the two nurses tidy the aged Robert one of them makes the joke, "What's pink and wrinkled and hangs outside your underpants?" The other nurse answers, "Mother." You then cut to the middle aged Robert and his mother laughing at a joke we do not hear. What sort of editing association did you have in mind here?

The reason was I hoped I could prompt the audience to laugh. But they never do! To give you an answer that's not so flippant, I do think there's something interesting about somebody telling a joke and somebody else laughing who's not directly connected with it. There's something just nice about that. It gave me pleasure. It was just a clumsy device if you like. But it showed him in a loving position because he's binding her foot. He's doing something for her and though it's never explained, it shows there's another side to their relationship because they're happy together. I know it's not

much but it was good to give a little indication that their relationship wasn't just all *Sturm and Drang*.

Couldn't that scene also be read in intimating Robert's repressed sexual feeling towards his mother?

I've never thought of it like that. Perhaps it does mean that.

In the second part of Distant Voices, Still Lives, the dead father's presence still dominates the family particularly in the humorous scene with the uncle.

His influence on our lives was malign. And it's still there even though he died in 1953. So you can't get away from it. It's had an enormous effect and ironically it's now been immortalized on film. It's as I said, you can't get away from it. It's there. In real life it was far more extreme than on film. I can tell you that if I put everything in nobody would have believed it. His influence is still there. It will be there for the rest of our lives.

I was appalled at the attempt by the Department of Health of Social Security's representative to refuse you benefit on the grounds that film direction was not a proper man's job! They certainly had no understanding of hard creative work.

Because they don't see it as real work. Even my family are the same. They don't think it's a "proper job." When the woman replied to my occupation as writer-director with, "That's not the job for a real man," I wanted to kill her. I think it was an outrageous thing to say. What's a "real man" anyway? She was there to get me, to harass me off the dole anyway. That's what her function was. I was on £23 40p per week. The manager of the place did overrule her. But it was so unpleasant. And not just that. I took my work to the BBC before I made *Death and Transfiguration*. This particular producer sat back and was profoundly unpleasant. He said that because there were good faces and you have a good cameraman, "you are really superfluous to the production, Mr. Davies!" He showed me the door. That was another blow. I wanted to blow my brains out. I felt, "I've clearly got no talent. I'm wasting my time." It was so awful. I shall never forget that because it was not criticism. It was malice. There's no excuse for that. It was so vicious. It's extraordinary how I find that people either love or loathe my work. Some say, "I loathe every frame. Such hatred you cannot imagine."

Are you now working on a film about the earlier events before Distant Voices, Still Lives?

I've just finished the first draft. So I hope to film this year.

U P C O M I N G I S S U E S

- 23. Documentary (Winter 1990/91)
- 24. Feminist Issues (Spring 1991)
- 25. Melodrama (Summer 1991)

You Could Look It Up:

Notes Towards a Reading of Baseball, History, and Ideology in the Dominant Cinema

by Viveca Gretton

To know baseball is to continue to aspire to the condition of freedom, individually and as a people, for baseball is grounded in America in a way unique to our games. Baseball is part of America's plot, part of America's mysterious underlying design — the plot in which we all conspire and collude, the plot of the story of our national life.

A. Bartlett Giamatti,
Take Time for Paradise

In the dead sunlight of a forgotten spring the major leaguers were trim, graceful and effortless. They might even have been gods for these seemed true Olympians to a boy who wanted to become a man and who sensed that it was an exalted manly thing to catch a ball with one hand thrust across your body and make a crowd leap to its feet and cheer.

Roger Kahn, *The Boys of Summer*

It's a dick thing.

Bleek Giamatti suiting up in
Mo' Better Blues

To say that the image of baseball in popular culture signifies above and beyond its status as an American team sport is clearly an understatement. Much has been written on baseball and its relationship to America and to America's past; countless books catalogue the myths, legends, and heroes of baseball either as formal histories or as anecdote and apocrypha. Indeed, baseball is constantly referring away from itself in a statistical enterprise that partly constitutes its past. The very language of baseball has been scrutinized as an expression of popular idiom and as an infiltration of everyday speech, and the appropriation of baseball by the academic and literary establishment is

an attempt either to exploit its ideological resonances or reconcile these resonances with baseball's enormous popular appeal. There are various theories on how to approach and interpret the infinite statistical information that is generated by baseball: these mathematical projects suggest baseball's quantifiable status as an occurrence that can be measured, calculated, and proven. Conversely, the literary and cinematic mystification of baseball as a function of religion, ritual, and metaphor continues to dominate popular discussion. In fact, it could be said that baseball in literature and on film functions almost exclusively *as* metaphor.

Baseball as a representation of America, past and present, is perhaps the most obvious metaphor for North American history as well as North American ideological values, yet is the one that receives the widest and most uncritical acceptance. The mystification of baseball and the over-evaluation of it as cultural signifier, however, does not prevent the image of baseball in film from offering what is most often a completely coherent reiteration of normative values and bourgeois ideology. Conversely, the few baseball films that approach a genuinely critical vision, such as Robert Mulligan's *Fear Strikes Out* (1956), John Hancock's *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1973) and Michael Ritchie's *The Bad News Bears* (1976) are structured around and dependent upon the demystification and the demythologizing of the normative ideology that virtually always supplements the presentation of the game. It is for this that the sudden influx of "baseball" films that appeared in the late '80s is significant.



In the latter half of the '80s baseball resurfaced in a number of films beginning with Barry Levinson's *The Natural* (1984). This was followed by Hal Ashby's *The Slugger's Wife* (1985), Martin Davidson's *Long Gone* (1987), Ron Shelton's *Bull Durham* (1988), John Sayles' *Eight Men Out* (1988), Steven Kampmann and Will Aldis' *Stealing Home* (1988), David S. Ward's *Major League* (1989), and Phil Alden Robinson's *Field of Dreams* (1989). Baseball films, it should be noted, actually cover many genres, therefore the term "baseball film" is used to describe a widely disparate collection of films. Despite the generic differences between these films (historical drama, romantic comedy, fantasy) they ultimately reflect the same essential reactionary assumptions. In this, with the arguable exception of Sayles' *Eight Men Out*, these films partake in an overall reactionary trend evidenced in mainstream films of the '80s. Of these films, *Field of Dreams* is without doubt the most insistent on the recreation of a mythical past, on the (re)writing of history, and on reinstating



Tatum O'Neal in Michael Ritchie's *The Bad News Bears*, 1976

the position of the Father using baseball as its primary ideological and metaphorical referent.

The purpose of this analysis is not to show that reaction and oppression are somehow inherent in the game itself. Indeed, this would only add to its current status as an already over-burdened sign. Rather, I would suggest that the attempts by these recent films to further mystify baseball (their suggestion that the game is inherently *anything*) is part of a larger and more pervasive strategy of reactionary political obfuscation within mainstream American film. Certain films that are purported to examine critically particular negative events in baseball history very often continue in this tradition of mystification. *Eight Men Out* becomes less an examination of early 20th-century capitalist exploitation than a re-telling of a tale of a betrayal of the game, its heroes, and of youthful male innocence. This is made particularly obvious in the emphasis given the scene of the legendary confrontation between Jackson and a young boy ("Say it ain't so, Joe").

Sayles, of course, is scrupulous in providing the economic and material facts which mitigate this betrayal, yet Sayles' maintenance of an ideal of baseball that exists above and beyond its economic factors compromises the film's status as a critique of capitalism. Certainly, the workers in *Matewan* have a significantly different relationship to their work and to the ideology of their work than do the workers in *Eight Men Out*; ultimately, baseball is more than just a job.

Since professional baseball is an entirely male-dominated game, baseball generates a male-dominated body of knowledge. Women are generally acceptable as fans (such as myself), but their active engagement or critical intervention in the game at any level is always perceived as an encroachment. One only has to look to Roseanne Barr's recent encounter with fans at a San Diego Padres' game. Her critical/parodic gestures (braying the anthem, crotch grabbing, spitting) were universally reviled as feminine transgression, illustrating not only her disrespect for the game but her disrespect for America. (The Ameri-

can anthem has always been closely associated with baseball ideology, and virtually every baseball film contains a significant scene in which it is sung.)

Baseball as History and Narrative

This is our grounding, our national story, the tale America tells the world. Indeed, it is the story we tell ourselves. I believe the story. . . .¹

Baseball has always been obsessed with its own history, with its own story. Yet if baseball is indeed a narrative (a pleasant, though questionable premise), it is a narrative that has undergone countless revisions. Baseball films invoke many "histories": the historical/cultural specificity of certain teams, either real (the 1919 Chicago White Sox of *Eight Men Out* and *Field of Dreams*), or fictional (the New York Knights of *The Natural*); the histories of famous men (Babe Ruth in *The Babe Ruth Story* (1948), Lou Gehrig in *The Pride of the Yankees* (1942), Dizzy Dean in *The Pride of St. Louis* (1952), Shoeless Joe Jackson in *Eight Men Out* and *Field of Dreams*); and family histories (Billy Wyatt in *Stealing Home*, Ray Kinsella in *Field of Dreams*). However, these "histories," with their often scrupulous surface attention to period authenticity, are less concerned with the past than with invoking a general sense of pastness, a pastness that is bittersweet, innocent, and entirely mythic. This pastness is often dramatized as childhood (boyhood) recollections. Both *Bull Durham* and *Field of Dreams*, despite the fact they are set in contemporary America, open with a montage of old photographs, albums, and memorabilia.

The "history" invoked by baseball combines North American ideological values with events selected and ordered by an exclusively male subjectivity. What is most significant is that however critical a film may be of certain aspects or events associated with baseball's history, baseball *itself* remains constant in its purity and innocence — the game may be threatened or suffer the trauma of corruption yet it endures as a trans-historical signifier of American indestructibility. For these reasons the histories constructed by and through the use of baseball in North American cinema are by no means irrelevant — an examination of how these "histories" are presented reveal counter-histories of suppression, exclusion, and marginalization, and further, illustrate how base-



D.B. Sweeney (with Charlie Sheen) as Shoeless Joe Jackson in John Sayles' *Eight Men Out*, 1988

ball in film exclusively reflects the fantasies and desires of the dominant ideology.

In 1989, Joel Zoss and John Bowman published *Diamonds in the Rough: the Untold History of Baseball*. While its tone is often informal and anecdotal, it documents the exclusions, marginalizations and suppressions that comprise the history of baseball from its inception up to the present day in a provocative and potentially subversive challenge of received history. Zoss and Bowman tell of the so-called "lost" teams of baseball, the black leagues, the women's teams, and of the "lost" players. These were the men and women who were excluded from the major leagues (and the major money), and whose achievements as players, coaches, managers, and owners often went unrecognized. Few of these histories have been realized on screen; John Badham's *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Star and Motor Kings* (1976) and Ken Solarz' documentary *Only The Ball Was White* (1980) are exceptions. The latter film renovates the achievements of black ballplayers by clearly emphasizing that white major-league baseball was not the only game in town. Zoss and Bowman also trace baseball's history as

a tool of American cultural and economic imperialism:

the spread of baseball on the international scene can be plotted simply by following the expansion of the American empire . . . The role of American oil companies in spreading baseball throughout the world could be a chapter unto itself.²

Barry Levinson's *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987) during its final scenes includes Robin Williams teaching baseball to the Vietnamese in what is meant to be a scene of unification and co-operation. Just as surely as the Vietnamese will respond to American rock and roll and American slang, so will they instinctively respond to baseball. In reality, this was the case in post-war Japan during which the American occupying forces "judged that baseball was consistent with the fostering of democratic principles" and actively encouraged it. In this context, baseball is as American as the Bomb (Roland Joffé's *Fat Man and Little Boy* (1989) shows the American scientists alternate between building bombs and playing baseball.)

Zoss and Bowman examine the revi-

sions that occur in the "narrative" of baseball history and often speculate on why such revisions were necessary. For example, they refer to baseball's "creation myth," the assumption that baseball's origins were American, WASP and rural. The myth that

baseball was a product of rural American life does not stand up under the unequivocal documentation that baseball came into existence among young New York City businessmen in the 1840s and was purely a product of an urban environment. Until after the Civil War, when baseball spread to small villages and towns, the game continued to grow almost exclusively in manufacturing centres.⁴

Baseball films often combine nature and the "natural" in a conflation that effaces the historical and material roots of baseball and disguises the machinations that would nominate baseball as "natural" proof of the rightness of dominant ideological values:

What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and



Field of Dreams: ensures feminine co-operation in the male fantasy of restoring the Father

what myth gives in return is a *natural* image of this reality . . . A conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with nature. . . .

Baseball as a "natural" object, an organic outgrowth of America's heartland, is a significantly recurring theme in baseball films. In *The Natural*, Roy Hobbs/Robert Redford's baseball skills are inextricably intertwined with his rural origins; his natural ability is equated with an equally natural goodness as are the abilities, sentiments, and intentions of the other "good" men and women associated with the Knights ("Pop" Fisher/Wilford Brimley laments throughout the film that he did not become a farmer, "Red" Blow/Richard Farnsworth is the epitome of rural "common sense," Iris/Glenn Close is the sacrificing farm girl Roy left behind).

In the bourgeois discourse of *Field of Dreams* the natural becomes the supernatural; baseball becomes a conduit for spirituality and eventual transcendence. Indeed, baseball as organic metaphor is present in the extreme; baseball players are the main yield of Ray Kinsella's crop. Heaven is equated with the state of Iowa; one is obviously meant to con-

sider this conceit as the possible "truth" in the false naïveté of Jackson's question, "Is this heaven?" Joe Jackson/Ray Liotta is elevated from tragic folk hero to redemptive spirit.⁶ Just as Babe Ruth/William Bendix has the power to make the lame walk in *The Babe Ruth Story* (1948), Jackson and his teammates can perform miracles.

Baseball is even more firmly separated from its actual urban environment in W.P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*, the book on which *Field of Dreams* was based. The hero endures a "nightmarish" visit to a Chicago ballpark:

Chicago, as always, is cold, grimy, impersonal . . . Two young women are approaching me; one has an Afro, the other's hair is corn-rowed as tight as if she is wearing a black-ridged bathing cap . . . I look at the slim brown hand that points towards the dark front of an apartment a block away. I imagine I can see indistinct, sinister forms lurking there . . . After a dozen steps I hear them burst into high-pitched laughter . . . Two more lounge on the curb-side of the car, only the thistly tops of their heads visible . . . I feel like a fur-trader who has just run the gauntlet . . . At a bus

stop stands a lone black woman, conspicuously pregnant . . .⁷

Kinsella's fantasy (both author and protagonist) is clearly a white, male fantasy that reflects an astonishing lack of inhibition and self-consciousness about its sexist and racist dimensions. Again, baseball signifies as the major symbolical referent for the privileging of white, masculine subjectivity. The hero discusses baseball with his wife: "Annie understands, though it is me she understands and not always what is happening."⁸

Field of Dreams makes gestures at renovating some of the more "awkward" aspects of Kinsella's novel by replacing the fictionalized character of J.D. Salinger with a fictional reclusive black author named Terrence Mann/James Earl Jones (although this was, in fact, initially done to prevent a lawsuit from the real Salinger). Despite Mann's presence, the reality of racism in America, and in baseball, is neatly evaded. *Field of Dreams* only appears to be resurrecting a "lost" history (of the 1919 Chicago White Sox). While it celebrates this resurrection, it effectively buries other histories. Mann's politics are established as a "gentle voice of reason during a time of great madness"

(presumably the radical politics of the '60s). Provided with the reassurance that Mann's politics are unthreatening, and that he is a secret fan of the game, Mann's "radical" status evaporates with his complicity in Kinsella's fantasy (Mann literally disappears into Kinsella's cornfield).

The scene in *Field* in which Shoeless Joe, a turn-of-the-century native of South Carolina, respectfully greets Mann is somewhat fanciful. Thirty years after Shoeless Joe, Jackie Robinson encountered not only outrageous indignities and violence from fans and other ballplayers, but racial hatred from his fellow Dodgers. This was certainly the experience of many non-white players and other ethnic players, nor has racism been eliminated in contemporary baseball. The ghostly players refuse to let Ty Cobb play in Kinsella's field (Cobb was, among other things, an infamous racist), a suggestion that only a few "bad players" spoiled the game.

Even baseball films that *do* address the issue can be problematic. Martin Davidson's *Long Gone* (1987) has Joe Louis Brown/Larry Riley become the only black player on an all-white, southern minor-league baseball team captained by Stud Cantrell/William Petersen. Despite the film's willingness to address issues that other baseball films ignore or suppress, the history of black oppression and resistance as filtered through baseball history is essentially renovated and retold for a white audience. Moreover, Brown's character is defined *only* in terms of his victimization (unlike the other two central characters, there is no romantic subplot for him). Further, the image of an all-white Southern baseball team of the '50s attacking members of the Klan with their baseball bats in defense of Brown is as credible as *Mississippi Burning's* portrayal of FBI agents as crusading civil-rights activists. As in *Field of Dreams*, the 1919 of *Eight Men Out* and the 1939 of *The Natural* are offered nostalgically, with little or no acknowledgement of parallel or alternative histories. (While Sayles' film does acknowledge the existence of the black leagues and black players in a single line of dialogue, Levinson's film is, exclusively, a white, male fantasy of unrelentingly heroic proportions.)

Women, Ideology, and the Game

If most recent baseball films avoid the issue of racism by using the baseball of a mythic past to recreate a time of

an "unchallenged" white male dominance, women have a more definite, though marginalized function in baseball films. From Mrs. Gehrig/Teresa Wright in 1942 to Annie Kinsella/Amy Madigan in 1989, women consistently appear in the role of supportive wives. Women's position in relation to men and baseball is clear and has remained relatively unchanged despite the superficial challenges presented in *The Slugger's Wife* or *Bull Durham*. Women either support, humour, and encourage men as they pursue the game, or they appear as malicious, destructive forces (Harriett/Barbara Hershey and Memo/Kim Bassinger in *The Natural*, Katie/Heather Macrae in *Bang the Drum Slowly*, the owner of the Cleveland Indians/Margaret Whitton in *Major League*). If a woman makes a stand against her husband (as does Debbie/Rebecca DeMornay in *Slugger's Wife* and Mrs. Dean/Joanne Dru in *Pride of St. Louis*), such a stand is only provisional or temporary at best. Ultimately, the husband's hopes and dreams retain full priority.

Bull Durham professes to have created a new baseball heroine and, to a certain extent, this is valid. Annie Savoy/Susan Sarandon is intelligent, assertive, and independent (unlike the apologetic Debbie in *The Slugger's Wife*). She actively seeks sexual satisfaction by "adopting" a new baseball player each season. Yet, despite the film's self-consciousness as a "modern" baseball film (largely manifested as a certain cynical patina), Annie's role in relation to baseball, while influential, is merely as an adjunct to the central careers of Crash Davis/Kevin Costner and Eddy Calvin Laloosh/Tim Robbins. Annie may *know* the game as well as any man, its strategies, averages, and statistics, but she will never play it *herself*. Annie's "philosophy" of baseball, the only "true religion," is meant to be subversive, as is her aggressive sexuality. However, her function remains little more than Iris' in *The Natural*; she positively intervenes only by her obsessive interest in improving the career of the current man in her life. As long as Annie does not threaten the economic interests or power base of baseball, she is perceived as a positive figure. Amanda/Tatum O'Neal in *Bad New Bears* was probably the last female to play ball in mainstream film.

Like Sarandon in the role of Annie, Jodie Foster brings to *Stealing Home* a strong star presence. Foster's roles include tough, independent, and intelligent women who survive situations of

victimization and male tyranny (*Taxi Driver*, *Hotel New Hampshire*, *Five Corners*, *The Accused*).⁹ Billy Wyatt recalls Katie/Foster as a transgressive woman, a free spirit who was a great influence on his life. Throughout the film *Stealing Home*, the triad Father-Son-Baseball collides with Foster's powerful presence, yet the result is a less than interesting attempt to reconcile the presence of a genuinely transgressive woman with the sexist content of a male coming-of-age film that uses baseball as its primary metaphor. The film resolves any potential tensions by simply making Katie's presence a non-issue; she is dead from the film's outset. Billy's memories of Katie enable him to play baseball again; her frustrations, her entrapment, and her eventual suicide are somehow interpreted as the key that allows Billy to fulfil the dreams of baseball glory that he shared with his father. What becomes most important in *Stealing Home* is not Katie at all but her ability to see and define Billy as a ballplayer. Billy, who is in reluctant possession of Katie's ashes, remembers and acts on this definition. The problem of "what to do with Katie" is solved when she is literally tossed away, apparently in some sort of liberating ritual.

One constant throughout baseball films is that the game is used to illustrate the primacy of father-son relationships; *The Natural*, *Stealing Home*, and *Field of Dreams* all prominently emphasize the death of the father as a significant trauma that is expressed metaphorically through baseball. *The Natural* opens with a montage that shows young Roy playing baseball with his father; his father suddenly dies at the foot of a huge tree which is later struck by lightning, and from which Roy fashions his bat, "Wonder Boy." This confluence of Arthurian legend, pathetic fallacy, and phallocentrism is maintained as the "natural" order throughout; indeed the film closes with the reinstitution of this order in the next generation as Roy continues the game of baseball with his own son.

In *Stealing Home*, the death of Billy's father interrupts Billy's baseball career and, as mentioned previously, the death of the transgressive female revives his lost career. In *Field of Dreams*, it is revealed at the end that the entire fantasy has been based on the desire to reconcile with the Father. Ray laments the fact that his days of student radicalism caused him to dismiss his father's hero, (Shoeless Joe) and to commit the ulti-

mate act of cruelty by refusing to play catch with his father. Again, the project of reinstating his father is an effort that elicits the willing co-operation of both Ray's wife and daughter. (The fact that Ray's mother is dead also is apparently of little significance as she figures only as an absence within the narrative). The film's dedication to "Our Parents" offers the film as an conciliatory gesture, an apology for any previous resistance or rebellion. Despite the false promotion of dream and fantasy as liberation in both films, at every level they are more concerned with adopting normative ideology and gratefully accepting the strictures of the super-ego. The only "dreams" that are fulfilled, indeed, the only dreams that are recognized are the dreams of the Father.

Fulfilling the dreams of the father through the son has been less obliquely expressed in both versions of *The Kid From Left Field* (1953 & 1979). A striking detraction from this pattern is Muligan's *Fear Strikes Out* (1956) based on the true story of the Boston Red Sox' Jimmy Piersall. The film horrifically traces the often maniacal intervention by Piersall's father/Karl Malden in the life of his son, Jimmy/Anthony Perkins. Even the game of catch that so often appears as the initial act of father-son bonding in other baseball films becomes a vicious and inequal exchange that hurts the young boy's hand as he struggles to endure this test of his masculinity and hide his pain from his father.

Young Piersall never refuses his father's demands as he struggles to fulfil his father's dream of baseball glory. The film is quite direct and unrelenting in presenting the project of masculinization, of appeasing the Father, as psychically destructive. It is also direct in demonstrating how women become victims as a result (Piersall twice strikes his wife). The film does nothing to mythologize baseball; it is a job with all the attendant pressures of competition, promotions, lay-offs, etc.. Jimmy unsuccessfully attempts an escape from his "duty," as he runs away in terror through an empty ballpark with his enraged father in pursuit. The realization of the American Dream for which Lou Gehrig/Gary Cooper thanks the American public at the end of *Pride of the Yankees* becomes the American nightmare of Piersall's public breakdown during a ballgame. Piersall is committed to an institution where he screams that his father is "killing" him. While the film eventually resolves the conflict by concentrating on the restorative powers of the heterosexual couple,

the combination of the sexual ambivalence suggested by Perkins' star persona and the film's unrelenting attack on masculinity subverts its conventional ending.¹⁰

Ironically enough, one of the few successful baseball films at the box office subverted the conventional relationship between fathers, sons, and baseball. Ultimately more subversive than Sayles' *Eight Men Out*, the supposedly lightweight *Bad News Bears* offers a scene where the physical brutality of the father/coach results in the open rebellion of his son; the boy refuses to make a significant play, leaves the game, drops the ball at his father's feet, and walks off the field with his mother. The film offers only tentative resolutions, (the team does not win the pennant in the final scene) and its overall cynicism renders certain aspects of the dominant ideology visible; its exploitation, its brutality, its exclusions, and its project of gender normalization. (In the same way, *Bang the Drum Slowly* offers no glorious wins or resolutions as it traces the relationship between the two men.)

On a final note, outside of the baseball film, baseball most often illustrates father-son relations in films as disparate as Spike Lee's *Mo' Better Blues* (1990) and Ron Howard's *Parenthood* (1989). Bleek Gilliam/Denzel Washington continues his games of catch into adulthood, and Gil Buckman/Steve Martin laments on his father's neglect of him at ballgames. *Parenthood* later echoes *Fear Strikes Out* in an extended comic fantasy sequence: Gil ruminates on the pressures he places on his son to succeed, and his attempts to masculinize his son through baseball, as he envisions the outcome of a fly ball that is hurtling towards the boy (a miss will turn the boy into a father-hating sniper in a bell-tower; a catch will turn him into a grateful class valedictorian).

In *Sea of Love* (1989), Frank Keller/Al Pacino entraps known petty criminals and felons by inviting them to a phony "Meet the New York Yankees" breakfast. After the mass arrest, a man races in with his young son in tow, believing he is late to meet the "Yankees." Faced with this touching scene of fatherly devotion, Pacino lets the man off with a warning. Baseball forgives all. Baseball can even provide metaphors for cinematic fathers of the radical Left: in Sidney Lumet's *Daniel* (1983) the father grills his son on baseball in relation to Karl Marx; the son recites his understanding of the means of production: his baseball hero remains a worker until he owns the team.

Baseball films are, indeed, never really about baseball; these films are about ideology. Films such as *Field of Dreams* unintentionally reveal the banality of their ideological project; without a trace of irony, the child points out to her father that the family can, in fact, make a buck out of this "field of dreams," that people will pay to see it. Further, the film's aggressive self-promotion as the '80s version of *It's a Wonderful Life* is part of an unsuccessful attempt to efface its politics in a overall atmosphere of nostalgia. The mystification of baseball as a positive metaphor for the American dream remains largely unchallenged in American film to date because the mythologies that continue to sustain America's national pastime allow for its easy appropriation by dominant cinema. If one could possibly imagine a "radical" baseball film, it might be film that would document and allow baseball's suppressed or ignored histories to speak for themselves; it would be a film that would refuse to mystify baseball and would critically engage with the established history and normative values reflected in dominant American cinema.

Endnotes

1. A. Bartlett Giamatti, *Take Time For Paradise: Americans and Their Games*, (Summit: New York, 1989), 83.
2. Joel Zoss and John Bowman, *Diamonds in the Rough: the Untold History of Baseball*, (Macmillan: New York, 1989), 403.
3. *Ibid.*, 11.
4. *Ibid.*, 40.
5. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (Granada: London, 1981), 142.
6. Shoeless Joe Jackson is a positive, if tragic hero of American ruralness. He is referred to, with somewhat less sublimity, in the "Shoeless Joe" dance number of *Damn Yankees* (1958). For a reading that situates the figure of Shoeless Joe in *Field of Dreams* as a middle-American fundamentalist fantasy see Harlan Jacobson's "Shot in the Dark: Born Again Baseball" in *Film Comment* (May/June, 1989): 78-9.
7. W. P. Kinsella, *Shoeless Joe*, (Ballantine Books: New York, 1982), 38-40.
8. *Ibid.*, 10.
9. In *Rookie of the Year* (1973) Foster portrays a little girl who is discriminated against as she attempts to play in a male league. Ironically, she wins the series by dramatically stealing home, an action echoed by Mark Harmon in *Stealing Home*.
10. On the subject of masculinity and baseball, umpire Dave Pallone recounts his experiment as a gay man in major-league baseball in *Behind the Mask: My Double Life in Baseball*, (New York: Viking, 1990).

GENRE AND AUTHORSHIP: TWO FILMS OF ARTHUR PENN

by Peter C. Knowles

Genre critics and auteur critics persistently debate the extent to which a film is a collective or an individual statement. In the classical cinema, the concept of genre services the

production system, the Hollywood 'factory' of studios that makes films for the bourgeois consumer and whose preordained formulas deny the director a full opportunity for personal expression. In his study of *Hollywood Genres*, Thomas Schatz points out,

In their formulaic narrative process, genre films celebrate the most fundamental ideological precepts — they examine and affirm 'Americanism' with all its rampant conflicts, contradictions and ambiguities.¹

Any criticism of American values generally occurs in the 'subtext' of the film; in terms of the narrative itself, the film's resolution eliminates any threat to social stability, re-affirming at the same time the principles of democracy — as Andre Bazin notes, "The American cinema has been able, in an extraordinarily competent way, to show American society just as it wanted to see itself."² In effect, the classical genres sustain the myths of America, the collective belief in what, despite urbanization, war and economic depression, still remains possible of the American Dream.

Several factors in the 1960s allow for the emergence of the auteur theory and a corresponding focus on the American

director: the collapse of both the studio and the star systems, the critical attention afforded foreign directors, the rising belief in the American film as a vehicle for social comment. The unrest and political dissension of the 1960s give the American auteur his theme — the change in film production his opportunity. No longer bound to a studio system, the filmmaker adopts the stance of the social critic — the significant films of the Vietnam and Watergate eras reflect the disruption in the social order, the loss of faith in the values of the American tradition.

The films of Arthur Penn speak to this new feeling in America. Penn's name is synonymous with the trend in the 1960s towards the subversion of genre and/or 'revisionist' genre. Both terms acknowledge the director's intent to rework from his own perspective the ideology and conventions of the classical cinema. In the decade of films from *Mickey One* (1965) to *The Missouri Breaks* (1976), Penn undermines the traditional myths of bourgeois America. Two films (both largely unrecognized) from this period — *The Chase* (1966) and *Night Moves* (1975) — significantly contribute to Penn's vision of a fractured social order; by subverting the genres that engendered these two films, the Western and the film noir, respectively, Penn breaks apart the formula and the ideology of the classical genre systems.

For *The Chase*, Penn places the sheriff-lawman figure from the Western community in a contemporary Texas milieu. In so doing, he takes an ironic perspective on the codes of honour and integrity that mark the corresponding hero in the classical Western. Pauline Kael notes the similarity of the film to *High Noon* — she labels Penn's film a 'Southwestern'³ — and in his role as protector-upholder of the law, Sheriff Calder (Marlon Brando) does belong to that tradition. Even the unnamed town⁴



The dislocated Westerner: Sheriff Calder/Marlon Brando with Mrs. Reeves/Miriam Hopkins in *The Chase*

has the look of a frontier community — the central Main Street locale retains the familiar hotel, the sheriff's office with adjoining jail cell, a cafe-bar to parallel the Western saloon, and, replacing the church, a religious pariah named Mrs. Henderson who saunters about with her prayer book and a distorted evangelist ethic. What alters conspicuously, however, is the social relation of lawman and community. The *High Noon* townsfolk remark continually on the singular integrity of Sheriff Will Kane, but in *The Chase*, the people scorn Calder for his allegiance to the town's patriarch Val Rogers. Penn denies the modern Texas lawman the mythic qualities that raise the heroes of the Old West above their communities. Calder works primarily from self-interest: he takes Val's job only to make enough money to buy back his father's farm and escape to the open range — the wild horse that runs across the road as he and his wife Ruby drive into town brings that world briefly and elusively into view. Essentially, Calder is a dislocated figure — even in terms of the narrative, he does little to affect the action. Rather, it is the malevolent Mr. Briggs who directs much of the story's progress towards the eventual holocaust. Calder can save neither himself nor the Negro Lester from beatings by factions of the populace, nor can he save outlaw Bubber Reeves from senseless slaughter. Unlike the 'rugged individualist' of the frontier, this lawman has no power either to alter or control the destructive urges of the community.

The lawman-outlaw opposition provides the narrative system of several classical Westerns: the threat from the outside takes various personas — the Clanton brothers, Burdett's hired killers in *Rio Bravo*, Frank Miller's impending arrival on the *High Noon* train, the black horseman hired by range baron Ryker in *Shane*. Similarly, the basic narrative system of *The Chase* follows Calder's attempts, however futile, to track, locate and re-capture Bubber Reeves. But the criminal, as it turns out, becomes less and less threatening. Essentially, the outlaw figure is the film's true 'innocent.' Bubber Reeves is little more than a confused, ineffectual convict, inept and essentially harmless. Betrayed by his prison buddy, disoriented by a failed attempt to reach Mexico by train, Bubber decides "there's no place to go" but back to his home town. The narrative implies Bubber's life-long innocence: "I took the rap for you once," he tells his friend Lester at the auto yard, and Edwin Stewart admits to

letting Bubber take the blame for a theft that he himself committed when they were young. Both his wife Anna and his mother in town promise to get Bubber a lawyer "this time," but Bubber, again indicted for another man's crime, has no faith in the promises of "this time." Bubber, in fact, has no faith at all. "I was coming to the end of me," he tells Jake, explaining his decision either to escape from prison or to die:

"I said, 'All right, boy. You're free.' 'Cause when you're willing to die, nobody can make you do anything any more. That was night before last. So I'm not going back."

Mrs. Reeves insists that Bubber is not bad — he just didn't 'grow out of his boy-meanness.' Thus, Penn lessens, if not eliminates, the outside threat, subverting the generic conventions, stripping the outlaw figure of his mythic dimensions.

The Western aristocrat, the cattle-baron or empire-builder, is another mythic figure who appears in several genres — the man who brands his cattle, claiming extensive ownership privileges on the range, later becomes the gangster overlord in the urban crime drama or the oil magnate on the great estate in the social/family melodrama. In *The Chase* town rich man Val Rogers extends his business power through real estate, banking and oil-well expenditures. What is conspicuous in Penn's variation of this figure is the patriarch's loss of power and essential inertia. While the Western aristocrat, the 'man who owns the town,' is formidable enough to be an active agent in the community, Val Rogers takes little interest in communal affairs, perpetuates his hierarchy by giving his name and charity to the founding of a local college. The social class that Rogers represents is decadent and corrupt. In the central party scene that defines the Texas aristocracy, Penn presents a collection of grotesques — the extravagant blonde who disputes the ownership of the birthday plane, the elderly lady in cowboy hat and pink pant suit dancing the 'jerk,' the donors to Val's college project who bumble through their dedication speeches like stand-up comics. Rogers himself, as played by E.G. Marshall, is too innocuous and effete to inspire strong reaction apart from his position. Yet the town despises him: his bank employees masquerade behind the facade of a birthday toast; his Mexican labourers mock his false generosity as they leave him for the season. Val's attempt to reclaim the love

of his son Jake gives him a sympathetic dimension, but his eventual beating of the Negro Lester equates him with the lowest level of brutality — to extort information from Lester, Val abuses his class and racial position to force the imprisoned Negro man into confession. Significantly, the three Western figures — baron, sheriff, outlaw — are undemonstrative and ineffectual; consequently, nothing and no one can prevent anarchic forces from breaking loose in the Texas community.

The eruption of anarchic violence is the focal point of *The Chase* and the film implies that a sort of 'lynch mob mentality' defines the very nature of the 1960s social order. The similar mentality that surfaces in the frontier — as in *The Ox-Bow Incident* — is only an aberration, the wrongs perpetuated by the 'unprincipled few.' Generally, when the killers ride into town, the townsfolk lock themselves indoors. In *The Chase*, however, the return of Bubber Reeves draws the people into the streets. An undercurrent of frustrated sexuality escalates into brutality and destruction. What begins as a 'pistol-and-penis' repartee at Emily Stewart's party leads to an Old West 'shoot-em-up' pantomime at the expense of Edwin, the timid party host. That itself ends when, carried away by the frenzy, the redneck Lem fires a real pistol. Rather than stop the charade, the shooting serves only to inspire neighbouring teen-agers to take up 'the Bubber Reeves game.' Finally, when Mr. Briggs reveals Bubber's hide-out in the car junkyard, the hysteria finds a means of release. The teen-agers toss homemade firebombs into the car dump while their friends dance to rock and roll music; the older men set tires afire, rolling them into the wrecks, eventually exploding Lester's car garage in the devastation; the town playboy Damon and his colleagues play another shooting game, firing at Bubber as he tries to escape through an adjoining swamp. The burning of the auto yard — in effect, the Saturday night orgy — subsumes the "rage and impotence" of an entire social order. As Penn himself comments, "The way those people shoot at each other in that film: it is not that they hate so much, it is more an extension of a kind of violence that they don't know where to deposit."

The ultimate act of violence, however, brings the Western motif fully into the 1960s. The earlier three-to-one beating of Calder by the spiteful band of townsmen demoralizes the generic fistfight ritual of the Western — now the shoot-out on Main Street between



Confronting the mob: Sheriff Calder/Marlon Brando protects fugitive Bubber Reeves/Robert Redford from angry townspeople in *The Chase*

Archie and the re-captured Bubber Reeves subverts any notion of honour associated with the codes of the frontier. Archie, the silent assassin, lingers on the periphery of the action throughout the film. Presumably, racism provides a customary outlet for the passions of the Damon Fuller bunch — they accost a Negro pedestrian outside Emily Stewart's party, fire at Lester when he runs from Anna's flat. Now, as Calder leads Bubber to jail, Archie emerges from the crowd of onlookers, guns down Bubber in the streets. The shooting is one of "the irrational manifestations of social and sexual repression" which Penn feels to be at the heart of the 1960s culture — in his staging of the event, he makes clear visual reference to the television reportage of the shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald. The urge towards violence comes full circle as Calder himself expresses his pent-up emotion, beating Archie in a futile act of rage at his own helplessness — and as revenge for the savage beating that he previously

received. The American culture's turn towards anarchy pervades each social strata; ultimately, no one is spared.

As in many of Penn's films, notably *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Alice's Restaurant*, the conclusion of *The Chase* annihilates any hope for renewal or regeneration. The eventual disruption in the film's narrative opposes the classical principles of closure; as Thomas Schatz suggests,

Actually, the most significant feature of any generic narrative may be its resolution — that is, its efforts to solve, even if temporarily, the conflicts that have disturbed the community welfare.⁹

The film's single hope of redemption lies in the relationship between Anna Reeves and Jake Rogers. The lovers, meeting in the motel room for a supposedly secret rendezvous, express more genuine feeling than any of the married couples downtown. They have both forsaken their natural feeling for each

other — Jake has married a woman of his own class, while Anna married Bubber to whom she now expresses her allegiance. Any sense of affirmation in the Anna-Jake-Bubber relationship ends in the film's final series of catastrophes. Val's closing line, "My son died at five o'clock," concludes *The Chase* on a note of irreparable loss; when Jane Fonda as Anna moves into the camera away from Val, her movement accentuates the fundamental estrangement that marks the quality of life in the town. Many couples in the film are childless — Calder and Ruby, Emily and Edwin, Jake and Elizabeth, Mr. and Mrs. Briggs — and with the death of the two 'sons' in the film, the sterility of the community only perpetuates itself. Penn's ultimate vision is of a society irredeemably divided within itself — the discordant factions, the class jealousies, the communal expression of anarchy fragment the culture into a moral chaos that is sustained, if not heightened, by events in the ensuing

Watergate era.

If Penn strips the modern lawman of the very 'raison d'être' of his existence — the power to exert authority — he performs a similar displacement with the private eye, depriving him of the most fundamental of his powers — the power to know. *Night Moves* is one of

infested city but his moral sensibilities and deep-rooted idealism align him with the forces of social order and the promise of a utopian urban community.¹⁰

Nor is there any devotion to the principles of 'sleuthing' for their own sake, no innate fascination with the processes of

more, the nature of his work is trivial and uninspiring. In films like *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep*, no one questions the validity of the profession or the integrity of the Sam Spade-Philip Marlowe ethic. But in *Night Moves*, Ellen chastises her husband's principles: "People ask you to do boring trivial sordid things and you do them."¹¹ Her lover Marty confronts Harry with the sarcastic challenge to swing at him "the way Sam Spade would," revealing the difference between Harry and his classical archetype. In bringing Delly Grastner home, Harry only heightens the family tensions. As Quentin asserts,

"You don't care what you brought Delly back to. Somebody says go find my daughter and you go find her. Somebody says spy on somebody else, you go do that. That's what you're all about."

Immediately upon the runaway's return, Harry witnesses a family quarrel that involves Delly, Quentin, Arlene and her new lover, but, legally, Harry can take no further role in the Iversons' situation. Once that he is paid for his assignment, he can only drive away, rolling up the car window to block out the sound of family discord.

The 'good woman-bad woman' opposition is another motif that Penn displaces in *Night Moves*. No longer does the good woman represent a safe domesticity. Harry's wife Ellen has an extra-marital affair with a shadowy acquaintance named Marty, rejects Harry's lack of ambition to improve the status of his 'breadwinning' profession. Inadvertently, Ellen perpetuates the false glamour of the rich; in her boutique business, she and her dandified partner Charles sell the "pieces of junk" that cater to expensive tastes and provide a market for the smuggling of Mayan treasures from the Yucatan. In Florida, Paula assumes the role of the 'bad woman,' the threat to secure marital relationships, luring the male into an adulterous, albeit unfeeling, sexual embrace. As the 'femme fatale' of the noir tradition, Paula deceives, manipulates, professes intimacy only to keep Harry preoccupied while Tom Iverson investigates the sunken wreckage of the plane. "You told me fairy tales," Harry later accuses her and the single possibility of romance takes the form of a quixotic dream to sail away past the Florida Keys, out of the social milieu altogether. The hero's acceptance of the good woman customarily occurs at the end of the noir film; in *Night Moves*, the reconciliation between Harry and Ellen



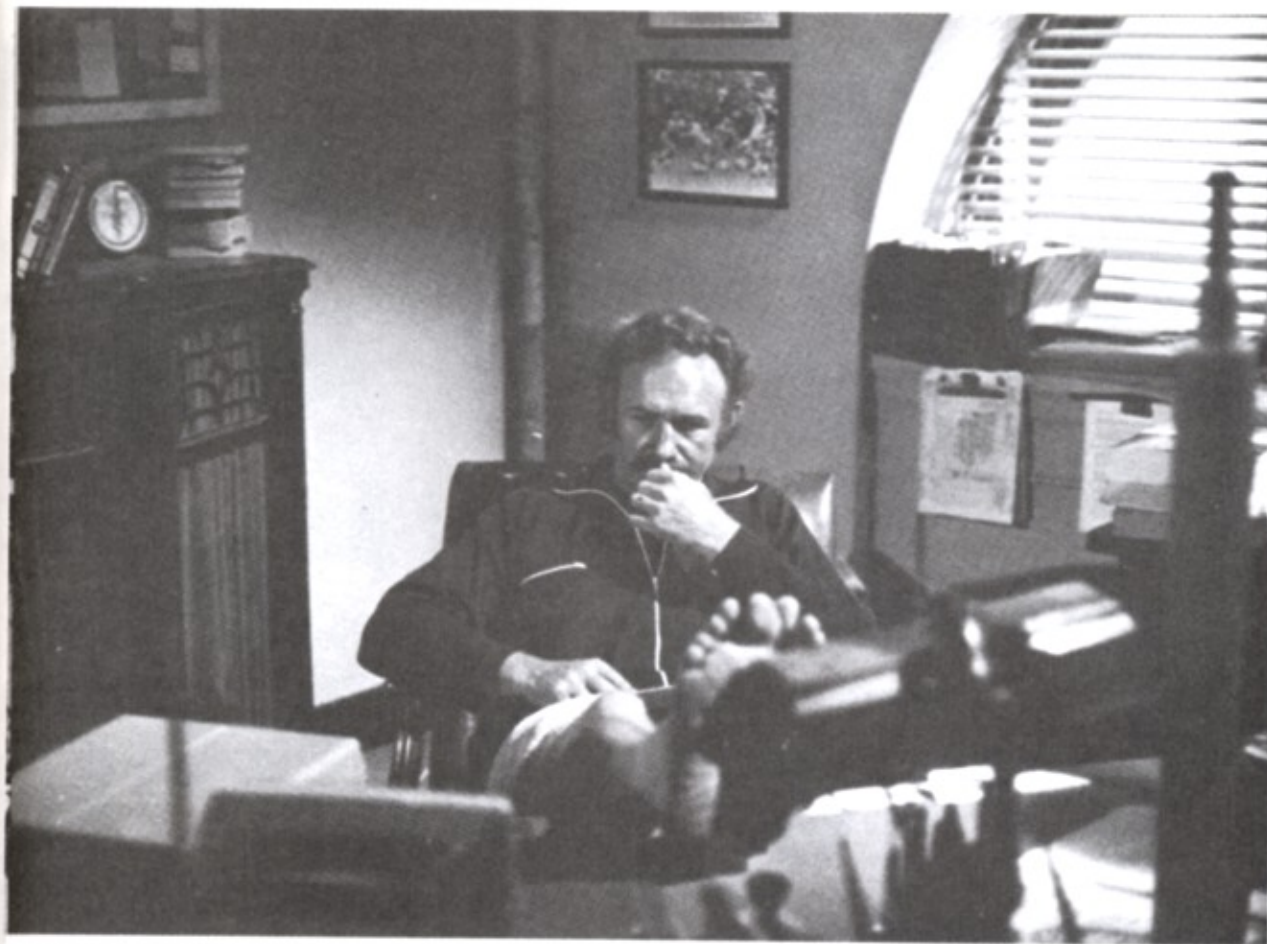
Jane Fonda and James Fox: *The Chase*

several films of the period that present the detective as a weak, ineffectual voice in the cultural milieu. The nature of crime has not changed from the noir prototype; in films such as *The Long Goodbye*, *Chinatown*, *The Parallax View*, there persists a complexity of under-world activity, a web of criss-cross and double-cross among the participants. What does change is the ability of the Watergate detective to function within an ideology where truth and meaning are obscure, perhaps indefinable — where even the Presidency operates through complex disguises of the truth. The moral parameters of the classic noir films — the clearly defined codes of good and evil — are themselves uncertain and indistinct. The hero takes on the moral confusion of his environment. Thus, the investigator loses the suave apartness that distinguishes him in the classical noir films; again quoting Schatz,

Like the classical Western, the hardboiled detective is a cultural middleman. His individual talents and streetwise savvy enable him to survive within a sordid, crime-

deductive reasoning. A mood of defeatism marks the subtext of the Watergate detective films: in *Night Moves*, the failure of detective Harry Moseby (Gene Hackman) to come to terms with his case suggests the failure of both man and reason — in effect, the analytical method — to penetrate the levels of ambiguity that define the contemporary experience.

Harry Moseby represents the displaced hero who is able to 'uncover' but who ultimately fails to 'discover.' He has no exceptional reasoning power, no special gift of insight, not even a vantage point from which he can decipher and understand. Harry becomes so immersed in the materials of his case that a crucial distancing is impossible. The job of private-eye is not even Harry's chosen profession. His first allegiance is to athletics; his interception in a long-ago football game gives him a sort of immortality among the football fans who, in middle age, join the watchers on the sidelines. References to his age (Harry is 40) and to his past as a noteworthy athlete indicate that Harry is a private-eye by second choice. Further-



The displaced detective: Gene Hackman as Harry Moseby in *Night Moves*

occurs well before the film's climax, thus invalidating the customary threat to the marriage relationship.

The most interesting treatment of women in the film, however, lies in Penn's attitude to Delly Grastner. Like Bubber Reeves in *The Chase*, Delly is the film's 'innocent,' a flower-child from the *Alice's Restaurant* generation, disoriented and out of place in the Watergate era. The coldness of Harry's sexual relations with Paula is offset by the tenderness he feels for Delly, for it is to Delly that he expresses his deepest emotions. He confesses his mid-life confusion, comforts her after a nightmare, shows genuine regret when he must return her to Arlene. Even their first meeting suggests a rapport and spontaneity:

DELLY: There's been some great storms. Feels like everything's going to blow away. I really like that feeling, you know. How old are you?

HARRY: I'm forty.

DELLY: I guess you like things to stay the way they are.

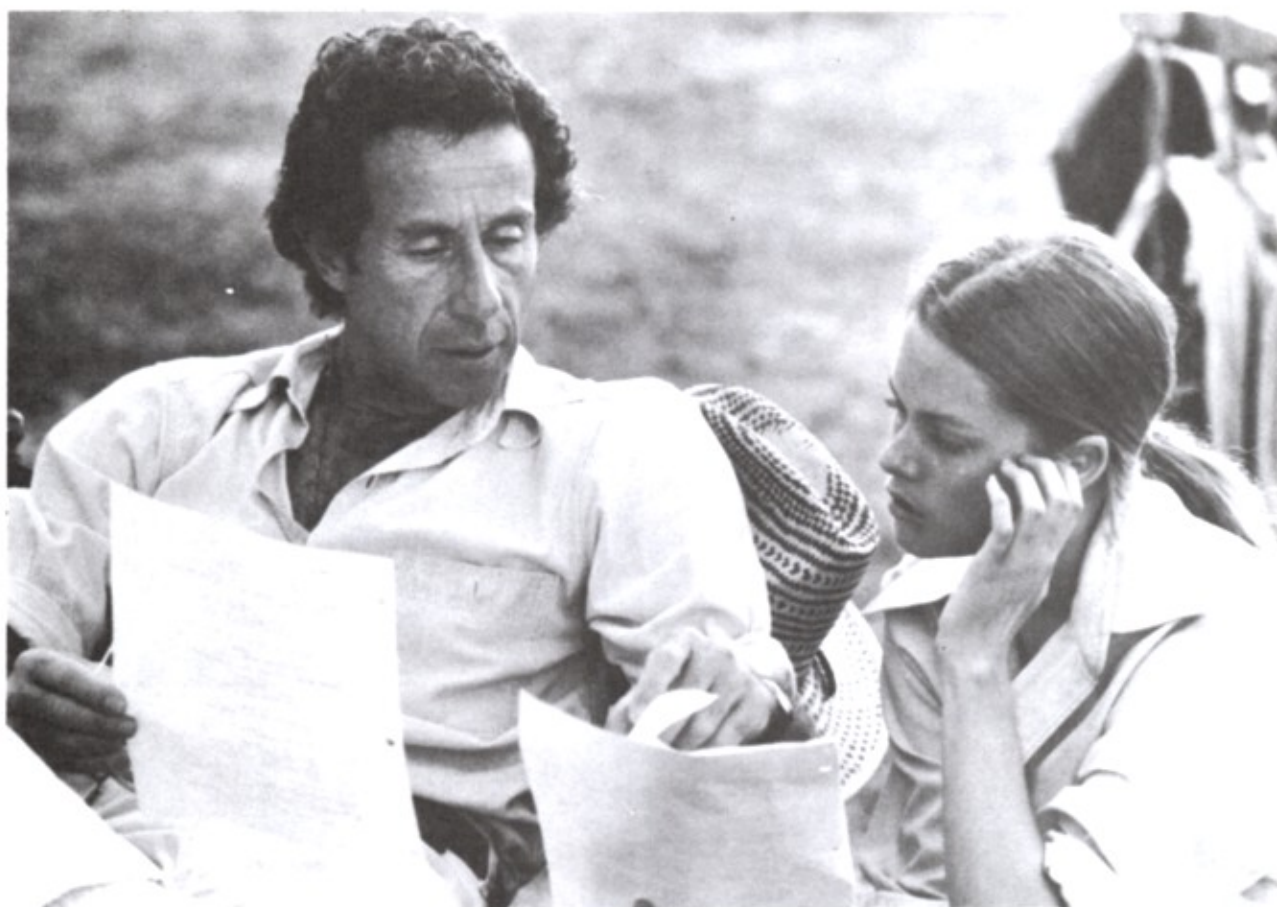
HARRY: Depends on how they are.

DELLY: I like things to change no matter what.

Yet Delly is the transgressor of the law — the legal system gives Arlene full custody privileges and Delly must be returned home. Tragically, Harry brings her back only for her to die in the subsequent stunt-car accident, presumably staged to eliminate Joey Ziegler from the smuggling operations. After her death, Harry rages at the injustices of Delly's life-situation by visiting Arlene 'in mourning,' transferring his own guilt onto the shoulders of the uncaring mother. The Delly Grastner case is Harry's last case. He decides to leave detective work after he understands her home situation and only the desire to discover the circumstances of her death draws him back into the investigation.

The urge to know, to rationalize and understand, is one of the primary qualities of the detective — his process of discovery through the labyrinth of crime forms the central structure of the mystery narrative. The viewer, sharing the detective's perspective, anticipates the final explanation, when each character's place in the scheme of things becomes

logical and apparent. Yet even on this basic level of narrative, Penn denies clear resolution. The 'constellation' of smugglers presumably includes Iverson and Ziegler as the organizers, Ellman and Quentin as the purveyor and mechanic. In deliberately excluding information that would ultimately clarify the actions and motivations of the criminals, Penn violates a fundamental rule of the noir genre. Viewers of Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep* still try to work out the enigma of one victim's killer when neither director nor writer claims to know who murdered him. In *Night Moves*, Penn carries the violation even further. No details in the text clarify the motivations for the murder of Ellman, the circumstances of the stunt-car accident, the need for Paula's death or the full relationship of Ziegler in the smuggling operations. A dangling tape message epitomizes the ambiguity of the plot-line: Harry switches off his answering machine just as Delly's voice promises valuable information (the identity of the man in the sunken plane?) yet Harry, contrary to viewer expectations, never turns to the tape and the message



Arthur Penn and Melanie Griffith on the set of *Night Moves*

remains incomplete.

The sense of incompleteness at the film's conclusion deepens the ambiguity of *Night Moves*. The film's climax — Ziegler's attack on Harry and Paula as they retrieve the sunken art treasure — does not resolve all narrative tensions and make possible the principles of closure; conversely, it introduces a new character (Ziegler) into the criminal plot and thus casts more uncertainty on the previous events in the narrative. In traditional detective genre, the climax allows the proper rescues and eliminations, taking place somewhere within the dark enclosures of the film noir city. Here, the finale occurs in the open sea at sunrise, and, after the catastrophe, the Mayan statuette, the 'stuff dreams are made of,' drifts off to sea, meaningless and insignificant. Only Tom Iverson has sufficient information to explicate the 'night moves' of the film, but Iverson does not appear to offer his information. And since Iverson has previously tried to dispose of Harry, there is no certainty that he will ever appear. Circumstances reduce Harry's own role in

the catastrophe to one of inertia. Wounded by the sniper in the sea-plane, Harry can only look on as Paula, unable to hear his warnings through her scuba gear, meets a violent death, and as Ziegler, trapped inside the sinking wreckage, disappears beneath the glass bottom window of Harry's boat. In the extreme long shot that ends the film, Penn abandons Harry to an essentially absurdist predicament, alone and incapacitated, faced with a new set of problematic issues, drifting in circles on the open sea.

The final image reinforces Penn's notion that Harry is "going to go on in concentric circles for the rest of his life . . . He'll go on being an unresolved seeker after some kind of external solution."¹² Earlier incidents and comments in *Night Moves* suggest Harry's position of inconsequence. Telling Ellen about "the best sleuthing job" he ever did, he describes how he "followed the clues" to discover his long-lost father in a Baltimore city park, a derelict on a park bench reading the comics from a newspaper. As he tells Ellen, "I just stood

there for a while and watched, then went away." Only at the moment of 'revelation' does Harry realize the futility of speaking to a father who has long ago abandoned him. Earlier, in an allusion to the word-play in the film's title, Harry explains a move from a chess game played in 1922:

"Black had a mate and didn't see it. Queen sacrificed and three little knight moves — check, check, check . . . But he didn't see it. He played something else and he lost. Must have regretted it every day of his life."

Like the chess player, Harry misses the right moves, fails to take a valid perspective. Even when Paula tells him that he's solved the case, Harry admits, "I didn't solve anything. Things just fell in on top of me." When Harry does participate in the action, he brings disaster: the deaths of both Delly and Paula, and possibly Ziegler, can be attributed to his interference. In the context of Harry's life, there are no victors; as he comments while watching a television foot-

ball game, neither team is winning — "one side's just losing more slowly than the other."

Penn himself states, "We're part of a generation which knows there are no solutions."¹³ Reflecting the moral and social disorder of the Vietnam-Watergate eras, Penn's films reject the generic formulas which posit the restoration of cultural values as their primary focus. The sea-plane attack in *Night Moves* and the chain of violence in *The Chase* conclude the films with a sense of complete rupture — as do the climatic shooting of *Bonnie and Clyde*, the fiasco of Custer's last stand in *Little Big Man* and the slow tracking shot that delineates the failure of the *Alice's Restaurant* counter-culture. The mythic individuals of the classical frontier and urban noir city affect the workings of the social order, exert a control over their respective destinies. But contem-

porary man, condemned like Sisyphus to strive eternally at a fruitless task, loses this essential quality of control. The subversion of Western and film noir conventions creates the 'revisionist' view of man without myth, of life without essence. Resolution is impossible — nothing can be done. Integral to the larger Penn thematic that unifies his work, *The Chase* and *Night Moves* illustrate the failure of American myths to define the nature of contemporary life.

References

1. Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, Random House, New York 1981, p. 31.
2. Andre Bazin, as quoted in Schatz, p. 12
3. Pauline Kael, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1968, p. 151
4. The name 'Tarl County' appears on a poster in the sheriff's office; this, I believe, is the only reference to a possible name for the town in the film.
5. Lillian Hellman, *The Chase*, Columbia Pictures, 1966. All further references to the screenplay of *The Chase* will be enclosed in parentheses and inserted in the text.
6. Arthur Penn, as quoted in Louis Giannetti, *Masters of the American Cinema*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1981, p. 382.
7. Penn, as quoted in Giannetti, p. 382.
8. Giannetti, p. 381.
9. Schatz, p. 30.
10. Schatz, p. 123.
11. Alan Sharp, *Night Moves*, United Artists, 1975. All further references to the screenplay of *Night Moves* will be enclosed in parentheses and inserted in the text.
12. Arthur Penn, as quoted in Tag Gallagher, "Night Moves," *Sight and Sound*, Volume 44, Number 2, 1975, p. 88.
13. Penn, as quoted in Gallagher, p. 87

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Laughter, Redemption, Subversion

in eight films
by Leo McCarey

By Margaret Smith

Leo McCarey began his film career writing and directing silent shorts, most notably under the auspices of the Hal Roach studio. He directed many of the greatest screen comedians: Laurel and Hardy, W.C. Fields, Mae West, The Marx Brothers and Harold Lloyd, possibly to the detriment of his own legacy. With so much creative genius connected with his films, there is no doubt that McCarey's own contributions are overlooked and undervalued. He is considered by many critics and film buffs as nothing more than a competent director of a mainstream Hollywood product, if he is considered at all. His movies are frequently dismissed for their overt sentimentality or political conservatism. If they are deemed to be of interest it is because of the stars that passed through them. McCarey has not been granted the same critical valorization as have other Hollywood directors because his films are entertaining before they are intellectually engaging, because he directs in the practical, seamless style of the Hollywood studio system, and because his work lacks the clear thematic unity of a Ford or a Hawks. Yet it is possible to find a common thread in

his work, and to discover that a McCarey world-view does exist. This world-view promotes healthy sexuality, spontaneity and improvisation, a warm and generous humanism and most importantly, laughter as its central unifying principle.

There is a German expression: humour gives freedom and freedom gives humour.

In Leo McCarey's films, laughter is utilized in a complex manner as the central metaphor (in the sense that illness can be used as a metaphor). In this paper, which considers eight McCarey films, I will examine the potential for comedy to be an actively subversive agent against repression, sublimated aggression and social convention. McCarey uses laughter across gender and class lines as a metaphor for individual and societal freedom. Through an analysis of his use of laughter in *Duck Soup*, *Ruggles of Red Gap*, *Make Way For Tomorrow*, *The Awful Truth*, *Going My Way*, *The Bells of St. Mary's*, *Good Sam* and *Rally Round the Flag Boys*, I will discuss how McCarey offers a radical critique of patriarchal capital-



Charles Laughton, Charlie Ruggles, and Mary Boland in *Ruggles of Red Gap*

ism, and the primary institution underpinning it, the nuclear family. I believe that the central film in McCarey's work is *Make Way For Tomorrow*, which exposes the tragic flaw in the conventional interpretation of the family, and I will use this film as the fulcrum around which the majority of the other films will be analysed.

Duck Soup, directed by McCarey, is unique as the only Marx Brothers movie in which form and content meld perfectly to achieve a profoundly radical result. The genius of this film is its political context, which thereby positions the anarchy of the comedians against traditional concepts of nationalism. Their disregard for, and disruption of, boundaries ridicules the discourses which underlie patriarchal capitalism. Chico and Harpo, in particular, continually transgress boundaries of class and gender, as they irreverently grab and/or offer legs, or rummage through pockets and clothing (their own as well as others) with total disregard for accepted practice. Men and women alike, across class lines, suffer these indignities. This

disrespect for personal boundaries (what was known in the '60s and '70s as personal space) extends as well to a disrespect for established capitalist turf. As Chico and Harpo destroy an irate peanut vendor's wagon, they destroy also the concept of free enterprise by repeatedly transgressing his assumed share of the market place.

The Marx Brothers' disregard also encompasses an irreverence toward political and national borders. Throughout the film, Chico and Harpo align themselves with whichever political faction happens to ask. As always in a Marx Brothers movie, the butt of the joke is Margaret Dumont, who, as Mrs. Teasdale, fails to understand that they are making a mockery of nationalist fervor, and its by-product, war. She concludes the film by singing "Hail Fredonia" with full patriotic enthusiasm, while Groucho, Harpo and Chico pelt her with fruit.

In *Duck Soup*, humour gives freedom — the freedom to offer a radical critique of Western society as it has been constructed under patriarchal capitalism.

In *Ruggles of Red Gap*, McCarey divides those who are exuberant and fun-loving from those who aren't along class lines, with characters like Belknap-Jackson and Effie Flood, would-be members of and pretenders to high society, sharply contrasted to Nell Kenna, the town Madam, and Egbert Flood, Effie's husband. The *raison d'être* of the latter pair seems to be the undermining of such stuffy pretentiousness as displayed by the former. Ruggles and Lord Burnstead both benefit directly from the overwhelming disregard for convention and free-spirited independence exhibited by Egbert and Nell.

In *Ruggles of Red Gap*, laughter is used as a precise metaphor for freedom. Surely it is Ruggles' unexpected, unbidden explosion of laughter (akin to a bottle under pressure blowing a cork) which represents his first step towards emancipation. This freeing of his spirit from generations of inbred emotional repression (repression as the internalization of oppression) transforms Ruggles' personality irreversibly. His later deliv-

ery of the Gettysburg Address is but the external expression of a spiritual release which has occurred before he sets foot in America. And in McCarey's world, alcohol is as much, if not more, a catalyst for his emancipation as the American dream.

With *Duck Soup* and *Ruggles of Red Gap*, McCarey explores the idea that personal freedom (or lack of repression) leads to social freedom, which in turn embellishes personal freedom, ad infinitum. Both films use comedy/laughter as the central metaphor. Within these narratives, humour gives freedom, and freedom gives humour. I've set these films apart from others because they precede *Make Way For Tomorrow*, and because neither is primarily an examination of the nuclear family.

Make Way For Tomorrow is a family tragedy. With this film Leo McCarey explores both gender politics and the inability of capitalism to embrace human dignity. McCarey also, I think, renders an astute and accurate portrayal of the precise way in which the various pieces of the nuclear family fit together. And again, laughter is the central metaphor of the film. The politics of gender are obvious. Lucy has had no life beyond the care of her family. (She has been self-sacrificing to a fault.) Barkley was able at least to visit with the boys in the barber shop, tell a few jokes, and have a few laughs. Nellie, the prettier of Lucy's daughters, has married a wealthy man. There is no evidence of love in the relationship, as McCarey presents it in the film. Cora, who is plain, has married badly, and through the strain of having to sustain the family unit economically — her husband is unemployed — is bitter, resentful and angry, and as a result is incapable of sustaining the family emotionally. There is no viable alternative for these women. They are undervalued in patriarchal capitalism, and have no access to the purse strings which control the American dream.

But it is the clever characterization of Robert which lends credence to the inter-relationship of the entire family as it is presented in the narrative. Robert is the youngest child, and the second son. He is always joking, often inappropriately, and is characterized as financially and emotionally irresponsible. This is true to form. As the youngest, his attempts at humour are congruous with the need of the youngest for attention and love, and he knows (and we know) that he's not the favourite son. Hence his seeming irresponsibility. He'll never prove his worth anyway. Robert's personality deficiencies illustrate the

most destructive element inherent in the nuclear family. With so many children and only two parents (and often only one nurturer) there isn't always enough love and caring to go around, and in an isolated family unit, there is nowhere else to seek it. The inverse situation is also destructive. With the attention of the parents being siphoned toward the children, there is not enough left to sustain the loving bond between them from which the family grew. Everyone ends up with not enough, or nothing.

Barkley Cooper, throughout his life, has not been financially successful. Neither of his sons are well-heeled enough to help the situation economically, and the daughters have no access to money, so they cannot offer a solution. Capitalism in the 1930s, before the onset of government-legislated (and therefore enforced) social conscience, offers no redress. Lucy and Barkley lose their home to the bank, and are separated. But in a moving five hour reunion they regain the jouissance of their courtship. They dance and joke and have a few drinks together. Lucy's youthful laughter is restored. McCarey thus posits the real tragedy of the film: the realization that Lucy and Barkley must separate after having rediscovered, too late, the love they had lost. And the metaphor for this love is Lucy's laughter, the one commodity that had gone astray amidst the demands of the family, that Barkley could find elsewhere — at the barber shop.

Humour gives freedom, and freedom gives humour, and McCarey's film proposes that capitalism, and the traditional family unit which supports it, offer neither.

Rhoda Cooper, Lucy and Barkley's granddaughter, is a character type, the exuberant teenage girl, who reappears in several McCarey films. It is significant that this character is female, for in McCarey's work, it is the women who most frequently exchange their youth, exuberance, aggression, physicality and humour for domestic drudgery and emotional repression. Although McCarey's understanding of gender politics, as we understand it today, is not necessarily conscious — it is more in line with Barry Fitzgerald's tenderness toward his poor old self-sacrificing Irish mother in *Going My Way* — his films nevertheless offer a subversive alternative which propose a re-evaluation and possible restructuring of conventional marriage and the traditional family. I would argue that it is McCarey's attempts to redeem the future for Lucy and Barkley Cooper in his subsequent films which predicate

these radical alternatives.

The Awful Truth has frequently been critically appraised, but as the McCarey film which immediately follows *Make Way For Tomorrow*, it is interesting to note the differences and parallels between the two films. *The Awful Truth* begins with the souring of a marriage, and potentially, a relationship. In order to redeem the couple, the ritual of courtship must re-occur. McCarey allows the Warriners, Jerry and Lucy (the leading female character has the same first name as Lucy Cooper, and it is significant that only the female names correspond, for Lucy Warriner is more in danger of a repressive, humourless future with Dan Leeson, who wants lots of children, than is Jerry Warriner in his proposed remarriage. Men, after all, have the barber shop, while women are isolated and trapped) to rediscover their love for each other at the point at which their relationship has begun to stale. They are beginning to take each other for granted, but the absence of children (there is a dog who fulfills the function) promises a perpetually renewable courtship. Again, laughter plays a major role. It is because Jerry and Lucy are willing to set themselves up for ridicule, to laugh at themselves and at each other, that they achieve personal freedom. Humour gives freedom, and freedom gives humour, and so, unlike Barkley, and especially Lucy, Cooper, who discover this too late, Lucy and Jerry Warriner are promised a happy future together.

Going My Way, and to a lesser extent *The Bells of St. Mary's*, offer a somewhat different alternative to the concept of laughter as metaphor, although laughter is important to both films. If laughter represents the absence of inhibition, then, by extension so must performance. (Think of Rhoda Cooper's dance while she listens to the radio in *Make Way for Tomorrow*, the strong performance component in the stage-based comedy of the Marx Brothers in *Duck Soup*, Lucy Warriner's song and dance in *The Awful Truth*, the remarkable sequence with Lord Burnstead and the drums in *Ruggles of Red Gap*, and contrast these moments to the self-effacement and almost perpetual public embarrassment of Lucy Cooper as she reacts to Barkley's forthright exhilaration.) It is performance which substitutes as the metaphor for freedom in *Going My Way*, most likely because Bing Crosby is a singer, and his films are expected to contain music.

The most overt example of a possible musical redemption from oppression,



Irene Dunn, Alex D'arcy, Cary Grant, and "Mr Smith" in *The Awful Truth*

and future repression, is Father O'Malley's diversion of the ghetto children's energy from crime to choir. I personally prefer to believe that it is not so much the uplifting and moral message of the songs, as it is the channelling of energy towards possible individual freedoms from social incarceration. (Although the organizational aspect of choir singing, and the potential for control and manipulation of children by a church hierarchy, is troublesome. Hopefully the substitution of performance for laughter in the central metaphor of McCarey's films partially alleviates the potential difficulty in my choosing to overlook the institutional nature of the Roman Catholic Church.) O'Malley's proclivity to perform in *Going My Way* parallels Father O'Dowd's incessant and irrepressible laughter. Interestingly, O'Dowd is named as O'Malley's successor as head of the once humourless parish.

Going My Way proposes two alterna-

tives to the impossible future facing Lucy and Barkley Cooper under patriarchal capitalism, in *Make Way For Tomorrow*. Barry Fitzgerald's old priest, because he lives in a more interactive, communal, even socialist situation (the Catholic diocese, and the family of the priesthood) than that offered by the traditional nuclear family, is not, unlike the Coopers, confronting a lonely, isolated and unloving old age. McCarey presents another possibility for the Coopers through the introduction of a character, Carol James, who is, in essence, Rhoda Cooper. With this character, McCarey explains the scene obviously missing from *Make Way For Tomorrow*: What happened to Rhoda while she was missing for 24 hours, and how did she become involved with the police? This is never explained in the film — the audience is left to surmise. In *Going My Way* McCarey offers the missing scene, and by proposing an alternate ending, potentially saves Bark-

ley and Lucy from separation.

Carol James has run away, the police have found her, and because she is vagrant, take her to the church for care. McCarey leaves no doubt that she is meant to parallel Rhoda Cooper. She sings and moves to music in an identical fashion (as does another young female character in *Good Sam*, who narrowly escapes a bad end after having attempted to make her own way in a dangerous, patriarchal world). And when O'Malley asks Carol why she doesn't return home, she complains about not being able to have friends visit because her grandmother is sleeping on the couch. McCarey, given a second chance, does not forfeit Lucy and Barkley Cooper's future. Carol James does not return home, but rather pursues a singing career (performance as metaphor for freedom), and (this is after all 1944) finds economic stability through marriage. If Rhoda had **not** been brought home in *Make Way For Tomorrow*, her

room would have been available for Barkley and Lucy, who could have then remained together.

The Bells of St. Mary's, like Ingrid Bergman's Hollywood films, is about, as Robin Wood has stated, restoring the Bergman smile. Restoring, in effect, her autonomy, exuberance and sensuality. Restoring her humour and thereby her freedom.

The Bells of St. Mary's offers, as well, an alternative to the conventional family configuration which so tragically failed Lucy and Barkley. Sister Benedict and Father O'Malley are free to love each other, many children and other adults, without being trapped and constrained by the institutionalization of that love, and without having those who are nurtured by and return their love, destroyed in the process. Nor are they themselves destroyed. Nor is their love destroyed.

Within the narratives of *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's*, McCarey presents a variation on domestic comedy. In *Good Sam* and *Rally Round*

the Flag, Boys he returns to an examination of the American family. A decade separates these two films, and the change in social and moral climate in America in the intervening years gives McCarey different options for plot development, and marital complication. Yet the essential problem with the traditional family remains the same. The inherent potential for tragedy which exists in *Make Way for Tomorrow*, which was filmed ten years earlier still, remains. So McCarey's exploration of the relative health of the nuclear family, encompassing as it does (in this paper at least) a 30 year span, unavoidably subverts the very idea of the family itself.

Good Sam and *Rally Round the Flag, Boys* parallel each other in several ways. The dilemma posed by capitalist values is somewhat different in the two films, but McCarey astutely situates that difference in the degree to which these values, and the institutions which support them, have become more organizationally entrenched in the intervening ten years.

In *Good Sam* the Claytons are about to purchase a house which fits within a particular descriptive mold — New England Ranch. The movie highlights the fact that this house is virtually identical to another ranch house in a magazine. By 1948, the uniformity of the suburbs is beginning. In the ensuing decade, the suburbs have become a fact. The opening scene of *Rally Round the Flag, Boys* presents a commuter train packed with men, naturally, wearing nearly identical corporate uniforms (suits), heading toward their, it is to be assumed, identical houses.

In *Good Sam*, Sam is manager of a department store, a store which is already one step removed from the Mom and Pop general stores once so prevalent in small town America. In *Rally*, Harry Bannerman is an ad man. His job is to market, and further entrench, uniformity of thought, action and environment. Social and materialist organization has, by the late 1950s, moved far beyond the individual peculiarities of the general store, and the fam-



Ruth Donnelly, Ingrid Bergman and Bing Crosby in *The Bells of St. Mary's*



Ann Sheridan and Gary Cooper in *Good Sam*

ily unit is still no better able to meet the needs of those who comprise it.

The most direct parallel in the two films, though, is the sense of social responsibility and do-goodism which defines two of the central characters, Sam Clayton and Grace Bannerman. The shift in gender is significant. Many of Sam's good deeds are directly tied to his signature on notes, or the lending of money. They are not always time-consuming, and are beneficial to individuals. Grace Bannerman is a housewife. As a non-employed woman she has no access to money, so her charitable actions must take a different form, which is community service. Because the men in Putnam's Landing commute to the city to work, they no longer feel a social responsibility to their community. Theirs is a financial interest, if events affect land values, or promise prestige or power. The suburbs have become an extension of the domestic sphere, the result being the assignation of community and charitable duties to the women as an extension of housework. But as in the household, the real power rests with the men of Putnam's Landing, who hold

the elected and paid positions of mayor and town councillors. It's also likely that Grace Bannerman has been to college, and community service therefore supplants her desire for a career. Lu Clayton, in *Good Sam*, has had, and relinquished, a career in favour of marriage.

The charitable natures of Sam and Grace exacerbate the problem endemic to the nuclear family — the sacrifice of the love relationship to the responsibility of sustaining the family unit. Oddly enough, this frequently leads to its demise. Sam Clayton can't sleep in the same room as his wife because he insists on housing her brother, thereby creating a space problem. Grace Bannerman can't commit to a second honeymoon with Harry because of a full schedule of familial and community duties. In both films, children are presented as barriers to active sexuality, although McCarey clearly highlights the sensuality of the couples. Here then are Barkley and Lucy at that point in their marriage which found her energy and attention diverted to the children, and his to the barber shop, and by implication, away

from each other. Yet in these films, McCarey again proposes, through Sam and Lu Clayton, and Harry and Grace Bannerman, another possible future for the Coopers.

Good Sam concludes, after several complications, with Sam and Lu's purchase of their new house, which thereby guarantees the privacy they need to sustain a loving and committed relationship. In the final scene, Sam sings *Let Me Call You Sweetheart* to Lu, echoing the touching moment between Barkley and Lucy during their second honeymoon in *Make Way For Tomorrow*. But McCarey, this time, enables his couple to rediscover and proclaim their love before it is too late.

Similarly, in *Rally Round the Flag, Boys*, the film concludes with Grace and Harry's renewed commitment to each other, at which moment he refers to her as Grace Oglethorpe, again a reference to the final farewell between Barkley and Lucy when he calls her by her maiden name. For Harry and Grace, this renewed courtship and second honeymoon comes early in the marriage, *before* they have unwittingly

begun to grow apart.

The use of humour in *Good Sam*, especially relative to the character of Lu (another Lucy?) Clayton, is complex and disturbing. Lu, as portrayed by Ann Sheridan, has a sharp tongue, and her style of humour is aggressive and sarcastic. Yet it is obviously this aggression and sharpness that Sam first loved. He guiltily laughs at her jokes, and admits that her acid wit adds spice to their relationship. But something has subtly changed, and the cruel edge to Lu's jokes begins to cut too deeply. This trend culminates in a scene in which she is unforgiving, sarcastic and cruel toward her brother's girlfriend (although in her defense she does not intend to be overheard). Ann Sheridan, with McCarey's support, offers a daring characterization that is uncompromisingly realistic. Sam is continually volunteering Lu's services, for which she is ignored (and he achieves sainthood) simply because he volunteers her to do what women are expected to do. Get a coffee, cook a breakfast, come up with a cold remedy, walk the kids to school. In the final analysis, Sam's charity consists mainly of financial risk, while Lu's, like Grace Bannerman's, entails the gifts of time and true service. Lu's resentment builds, and as it does, her humour acquires a bitter edge. Sam's distribution of their money to those who are (sometimes) more needy, traps Lu materially, until she is finally deprived of the sensual, sexual joyful relationship with Sam which had previously sustained her. Lu's greedy demand for a house is a sublimated desire for a recommitment, from Sam, to their relationship. Superficially, McCarey's portrait of Lu is neither generous nor attractive. Yet upon closer examination she is a vibrant, witty, sensual woman who is terrified of becoming Lucy Cooper — her laughter finally, and perhaps forever, repressed.

In *Rally Round the Flag, Boys*, Grace Bannerman is serious, organized and distinctly humourless. Harry is adolescent, amorous and selfish. In *this* film, it is Harry's humour that is begin-

ning to acquire the hard edge of resentment. But when Harry and Grace reaffirm their commitment to, and love, for, each other, they both burst out laughing — in relief, and as a mutual declaration of independence from the institutions — army, family, suburbia — which threaten their future together. Humour gives freedom, and freedom gives humour.

If the nuclear family, as an institution, props up patriarchal capitalism, and is in turn propped up by Romantic Love, how then are films in which love between men and women is central, subversive? There are two reasons. McCarey positions the family as counterproductive to the nurture of healthy love, and he pointedly deconstructs the myths which propagate Romantic Love in both *Good Sam*, and *Rally Round the Flag, Boys*. In the former, McCarey counterpoints the reading of the fairytale, *Cinderella*, with the reality of happily ever after. Sam reads the story to his daughter so she will fall asleep, thereby enabling him a rare opportunity to liaise sexually with his wife. As he becomes more aroused at this prospect, his rendering of the story begins to intermingle with other fairy tales, specifically the old woman whose cupboards were bare, and the old woman who lived in a shoe and had so many children she didn't know what to do. When Lu in her turn continues reading the story to the recalcitrant child, she likewise becomes distracted by what awaits, and her fairy tale wanders to Little Miss Muffet being frightened away by a spider. Happily ever after has become, within McCarey's narrative, parents resenting and/or wishing away their children so that they might rediscover that same Romantic Love which forms the foundation of their entrapment.

In *Rally*, Tuesday Weld translates a fairy tale into Beat language, and in the process underscores the resilient and co-optive potential, and therefore the real power, of this Romantic mythology. Beatniks are in rebellion against traditional and conventional social institutions, such as the nuclear family, and

yet myths which propagate Romantic Love, and by extension the nuclear family and patriarchal capitalism, can incorporate and subsume this potentially subversive element. Changing the language alone doesn't change the content.

With these eight films, Leo McCarey offers a radical alternative, if only because the central metaphor of these films is laughter. Laughter has a wonderful potential for subversion of the status quo. It's been my intent with this analysis of some of McCarey's domestic comedies to highlight other means by which his work disrupts and questions the institution of the traditional family which to this day continues to undermine and destroy human potential.

Since this paper was written, I've viewed *Once Upon a Honeymoon*, a film in which McCarey again utilizes laughter as a central metaphor. It is Ginger Rogers' uproarious laughter at Cary Grant's saxophone playing (laughter which totally confuses Walter Slezak, her fascist, and therefore humourless, husband) which signals her imminent commitment to the cause of freedom. In order to accept this position, Rogers must eventually sacrifice the material rewards of patriarchal capitalism, the jewels given to her by her husband. McCarey thereby positions personal freedom, as represented by laughter, above the capitalist metaphor for freedom, material wealth.

Leo McCarey's use of laughter in *Once Upon a Honeymoon* is extremely complex. Rogers' conversion in the film (symbolized by her laughter) predicates a tonal shift away from humour toward drama. With this shift, McCarey's film subverts the potential for individual freedom to be contained by its own rewards. By underscoring the necessity of using individual freedom as a springboard for guaranteed social freedom, McCarey presents a radical critique of complacent capitalism. Humour gives freedom, but *freedom* gives humour. And in McCarey's world, both are essential for the unrestricted growth of human potential.

"FUCK SAL'S PIZZA"

Spike Lee's Do The Right Thing

as a Product of

the Hip Hop Movement

That turn-the-other cheek stuff has outlived its usefulness. All people want to talk about is the burning of Sal's Pizza. It just shows people don't care about black life; they devalue black life. They're more concerned that white people's property got destroyed. Fuck Sal's Pizza. We have to protect black life.

— Spike Lee

by James A. Hurst

Nineteen fifty four is considered a crucial year in the history of Afro-Americans because that was the year segregation was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, a decision

that has rarely been enforced. From that year onward Afro-Americans have had to face daily the fact that America is a racist nation unwilling to enforce laws that are part of its own constitution. Some Afro-Americans have realized that freedom does not come by proxy, that to achieve liberty one has to fight for oneself whether through civil disobedience or violent insurrectionary acts. The civil rights movement paved the way for Malcolm X, the first truly Afro-American revolutionary. X prophesized the "coming of the gun"; the violent stage of the black revolution in America that would draw upon support from (and eventually lend support to) Afrikan nations fighting similar wars of independence. Huey Newton picked up that fabled gun and waved it threateningly at white America like a suicidal lunatic. In retrospect, the Black Panthers never had a chance, their suicidal antics alienated many blacks whose solidarity they desperately needed. But this was the age of the Mau Mau, Castro, Mao Tse Tung and the Algerian revolution and hope was in the air for black militants who felt the fabled revolution was on its way.

However, by the early 1970s, the white power structure had ably communicated to black activists how they felt about black power: X, King, Freddy Hampton, and George Jackson had been assassinated, Cleaver exiled, Seale bound and gagged in a court of law, Angela Davis and Huey Newton made political prisoners, attack dogs set to the freedom marchers in Selma and the inmates in Attica deliberately slaughtered. Nixon's appeals to law and order touched the hearts of the white majority who naively believed that (in Hoover's words) "internal rebellion [was] the number one threat to American society."

The "silent majority" were scared enough by the Viet Nam War and the last thing they needed was to watch tanks roll in and APCs unload onto the boulevards of American cities. It's one

thing to turn on the news and watch a ramshackle Viet Cong village getting strafed but it's another to see a black fifth column at work in your own town, brazenly throwing bricks and molotovs through the windows of hard-won white businesses. *Maybe it's just the ghetto on fire tonight but that could be our neighbourhood tomorrow.* Nixon realized that if he couldn't stop the riots he could at least try to keep them off the news. Spiro Agnew held meetings with the broadcast news executives and he swayed them easily; many of them put into effect a rule that news cameras had to be shut off if a demonstration turned violent.² Out of sight — out of mind, as the old adage goes. America had tired of the martyrs and the marches, the revolutionaries and the riots, so it promptly turned over and went to sleep.

Mister Senor Love Daddy:
Waaaaake up!
Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!
Up ya wake! Up ya wake! Up ya wake!

But in the last five years there has emerged a militant strain in Afro-American culture which has so far reached the apex of its expression in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*. Quite simply, when Lee throws the garbage can through the window of Sal's Famous Pizzeria, he is ushering in a new era of American film. Never before has such a patently seditious act been committed on an American screen; never before has such a passionate voice of dissent been raised in a Hollywood picture. It is a testament to Lee's self-will that he managed to even get this movie made, let alone make it a hit. But in a sense Lee is not wholly responsible for this film's success: a cultural climate had been created, thanks to the Afro-American youth movement called Hip Hop, that allowed this film to find an audience.

It is impossible to understand *Do the Right Thing* without first examining the correlation of two elements: first the historical/cultural background that led to the birth of Hip Hop; and second the movement itself and how it was virtually revolutionized by the rap group Public Enemy. Once we have adequately examined these two sources we will turn our attention to an analysis of *Do the Right Thing*.

The New Minstrelsy & Staglee

Agnew's meetings with the news executives signalled the start of a wave

of media backlash against blacks as America entered the Republican era. Television, which had been a kind of domestic battleground throughout the 1960s, was marked in the '70s by the rise to prevalence of the situation comedy and with it the rise of a new Black Minstrelsy. These black clowns, Flip Wilson, Jimmy Walker, etc., provided a sigh of relief for whites who had come to expect all blacks on television (and hence all blacks in America) to be militant. It became expected of all black comics to mock race riots and activism. (I remember one black comic who drew applause from a white audience when he remarked, after one of his jokes bombed, "You better laugh, I could be militant.") Politicized black comedians like Dick Gregory and Richard Pryor all but disappeared; Pryor's only comedy special contained a sketch where Huey Newton was nominated to President and coincidentally the show was pre-empted.

We know that television, although white-dominated, is a medium that at least ostensibly caters to both white and black audiences. Hence programming that deals with Afro-Americans is obligated to be both palatable and inoffensive to the average white man and woman, the prized audience. (It goes without saying that the same attention and consideration is rarely paid to black audiences.) But unlike television, racial segregation has existed to this day in radio and cinema which has permitted the emergence of different themes and genres along racial lines. Hence in the 1970s when the television media reacted to the revolutionary 1960s by denigrating blacks, the black cinema counteracted by giving blacks super-human powers within the Blaxploitation genre.

The myth that Blaxploitation put forward was understandable to people of all colours but what may surprise some is that those black superheroes were merely the reworking of a piece of traditional Afro-American folklore, the legend of Staglee. Staglee (sometimes spelled Staggerlee or a myriad of other ways) is simply the myth of the "bad/crazy nigger" and it has been a mainstay of Afro-American culture. When the legend of Staglee began (possibly in the days of slavery) it was of the 'picaresque' tradition: a long narrative comprised of the episodic adventures of a rogue or knave.⁴ Staglee is the ultra-macho black anti-hero who survives by cunning and violence and who was not without subversive possibilities: he was disenfranchised and amoral, powerful and street-wise; the perfect revolution-

ary. Previously, Staglee had appeared in blues songs, the detective novels of Chester Himes but most significantly he was personified by blaxploitation heroes Shaft, Superfly and Sweet Sweetback.

In 1970, Melvin Van Peebles made *Sweet, Sweetback's Badass Song*, a film that enjoyed an immense popularity with black audiences. The film credited "the black community" as its stars and its provocative treatment of black sexuality and politics even prompted Huey Newton to write its "revolutionary analysis." (The Black Panthers had also used *Battle Against Algiers* as a recruitment film.) However, the success of *Sweet, Sweetback* spelled disaster as Hollywood "discovered" this black market for cheaply made films and scrambled to fill the demand with an able supply. In 1973 alone an estimated two hundred "Blaxploitation" films were produced and all but a few were made exclusively by whites.

But Blaxploitation eventually gave way to the martial arts genre which won over black audiences with its verisimilar depiction of violence as well as its subversive potentialities. Black male audiences could identify with Bruce Lee, the Chinese Staglee who in *The Chinese Connection* defeated racist Japanese foes who goaded him into fighting with racial slurs like "What's the matter? Scared to fight? What are you, yellow?"

Blaxploitation reappeared recently in *Action Jackson* and more interestingly in Berry Gordy's *The Last Dragon* which was an attempt to integrate Blaxploitation, black musical and martial arts genres. Rap group Run-D.M.C. asked Spike Lee to direct their Rap-meets-Blaxploitation film *Tougher than Leather* but he wisely refused, not wanting to rehash Blaxploitation themes.

However, Blaxploitation has left its mark. The young men who watched those films again and again were to later come up with Hip Hop (Rap artists will often cite films like *The Mack* and *Across 110th Street* as their favourites), a ghetto movement among blacks that includes Rap, graffiti, language, dress and dance. In 1988, just as Rap was developing into a popular form, Be-Bop legend Max Roach had this to say:

Hip Hop is related to what Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker did . . . [Parker and Armstrong] didn't have the advantage of a conservatory education but they came up with something that affected the whole world. Hip Hop came out of the city's poorest areas, out of miserable housing.

They didn't have visual arts classes and yet these people came up with something erroneously called graffiti. On the dance side they came up with break-dancing. And on the music side, because they didn't have instruments they invented a way to create sounds with turntables. . . . They joined the ranks of Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker because they created something out of nothing.¹

Papa Ooo MauMau: Public Enemy — "The Black Panthers of Rap"

In 1988, a Long Island rap group by the name of Public Enemy released their second album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us Back*, a masterpiece of Afro-American discontent and rage, and it sent shockwaves through the rap community. The potential for subversiveness had always existed in Rap just as it had in Blaxploitation and the legend of Stagolee. But the average, pre-Public Enemy rap star spent most of his career holding his penis and rapping about his super-stud/gangster status. The aspect of criminality was a strong part of the myth epitomized in Schooly D's lines:

Fuck school, school is getting cheesier
Fuck work, my work is getting messier
Fuck life, I'm tired of getting pleasier
I'd rather sell drugs, selling drugs is easier²

Rap's preoccupation with crime could be read as (what Eldridge Cleaver once called) a force of resistance against an oppressive society. But the criminal-Stagolee routine was wearing thin and Rap was quickly becoming a mockery of itself: a progressive movement that had degenerated into a massive bragging match of pseudo-Stagolees and hyper-capitalists.

Perhaps Public Enemy recognized this and decided to recast Hip Hop into what it should have become. They took the Stagolee image, stripped it of metaphor and realized its subversive potential. The rappers, Chuck D (calls himself alternately "the lyrical terrorist" and "messenger of prophecy") and Flavour Flav ("the joker") would come on stage flanked by their armed bodyguards, the SIWs (Security of the First World) who pointed fake Uzi's at the audience. They called themselves the "Black Panthers of Rap" and modelled themselves accordingly: Chuck D after Huey Newton, Flavour Flav after Bobby Seale and last and not least the execrable Professor Griff, PE's so-called "Minister of Infor-

mation" (later dismissed from the group for anti-semitic remarks) after Eldridge Cleaver.

Public Enemy's immense popularity and fierce loyalty amongst Hip Hop fans has caused a marketing trend where rappers are now obliged to include pro-Afo songs on each album or face mass disapproval. (Some of course were "militant" previous to PE but were nowhere near as successful. Note rapper "KRS One" who interestingly released his second album, *By All Means Necessary*, with a cover photo modelled after the classic shot of X peeking through a window curtain with a rifle in his hand — except in this case KRS is holding a deadly UZI handgun.) Where gold chains, beepers and Jeep Cherokees were once *de rigeur* for Rap stars and

ture "out of nothing," on a shoe-string budget, using what he described as "guerrilla film-making" tactics to pull the picture off. And if this picture *She's Gotta Have It*, does not exactly match the creativity or inventiveness of Rap, it is still accurate enough in its depiction of Mars Blackmon, the Hip Hop fan in the picture to rank it as the first time this youth movement has received decent treatment in film.

She's Gotta Have It was ostensibly about Nola Darling, a woman condemned by her three boyfriends for her free sexuality. But Mars, one of her boyfriends and played by Lee, was clearly the star; he steals the show with his clever Hip Hop idioms and his uproarious B-Boy style and manner. Mars brings the house down when he begs



Public Enemy's Chuck D: The "Lyrical Terrorist" imagining himself on Death Row.

their fans, African medallions, natural hairstyles and an overall anti-capitalist (to say leftist would be premature) and back-to-Afrika philosophy has become the current trend. The absence of gold chains has no doubt been influenced by Public Enemy's assertion "Gold: we don't own it, so why wear it?" Public Enemy have created a radical chic whose influence can be seen in even the new-minstrelsy buffoon Arsenio who so recently has jumped on the pro-black bandwagon.

Spike Lee, Mars Blackmon and Hip Hop

If there is a match to Hip Hop in cinema then it would have to be in the films of Spike Lee. Like the blacks Roach described, Lee made his first pic-

Nola "Please baby, please baby, please baby, baby, please."

After Mars Blackmon's success, Lee was told by Hip Hop fans that he "really understands B-boys" and Mars-speak has become a mainstay of the Hip Hop culture. Rapper Tone Loc had the biggest selling single by a black artist with "Wild Thing"; the title of the song as well as its idioms are pure Mars-Speak, extracted from *She's Gotta Have It*. And the promotional video for "Wild Thing" featured the same actress who played Nola Darling.

Further lines connecting Lee to Hip Hop include Lee's numerous advertisements for Nike sneakers which feature Mars Blackmon taking on Michael Jordan. These ads have enjoyed an immense popularity and when combined with his rather open product

placement of Nike shoes in *Do the Right Thing*, have led directly to Nike being the brand of choice for B-boys. On an episode of 'Saturday Night Live' Spike Lee appeared as Mars Blackmon to introduce rap group Run-DMC and took the opportunity to denounce the association between Hip Hop and violence. Still, Lee refused to repeat the infamous "Please, baby, baby, please" line, saying he did not want it to become as exploitive as Jimmy Walker's "Dy-No-Mite!" Spike's coproducer Monty Ross has said: "After *She's Gotta Have It*, Spike could have done *Mars Blackmon the Sequel*, *Mars Blackmon Part 5*. But he just said to the studios 'Mars Blackmon is dead.'"

But if Mars Blackmon, the ultimate media spokesman for Hip Hop, has disappeared, Lee's interest in linking himself to the Hip Hop movement has not. For his third picture, *Do the Right Thing*, Lee asked a number of rap artists to record an anthem for the picture. Lee wanted what he describes as a "marching song" for Radio Raheem/Bill Nunn, something to be played on Raheem's box repeatedly throughout the film. The song eventually decided upon was Public Enemy's "Fight the Power." Hardly a better song could have been picked. Interestingly though, on the twelve inch single of "Fight the Power" the flip side features Spike Lee rapping with Flavour Flav. Lee has gone one step further than spokesman-ship of Rap, he has become a part of Hip Hop culture himself.

It therefore seemed a natural move for Spike Lee to include Public Enemy in *Do the Right Thing*. It would be unfair to claim that Spike was jumping on the bandwagon; it would be more accurate to state that the rise in black militancy expressed in Hip Hop, thanks to Public Enemy's incredible success, had made the climate suitable for a more direct, outspoken political statement like *Do the Right Thing*.

... *Do the Right Thing* was not about Black people in three-piece suits going to work, it was about the Black underclass in Bed-Stuy, a community that has some of the highest unemployment, infant mortality and drug-related homicide rates in New York City. We're talking about people who live in the bowels of the socio-economic system but still live with dignity and humour.
— Spike Lee⁹

What is curious about *Do the Right Thing* is that it praises both X and King, leaders whose ideologies are pretty

much mutually exclusive. *Do the Right Thing* begins with Smiley, a kind of village idiot, holding up a postcard print of the classic photo of Malcolm and King amiably shaking hands. The soundtrack is melancholy at this point, it pours sentimentality over what Smiley has to say:

SMILEY: (Stutters) Good morning. My name is Smiley. This is Malcolm X. This is Martin Luther King. Now they're dead. But we still have to fight against A... p... ar... t... hate!

This opening, which sets the political theme for the movie, mourns the passing of the two leaders. The postcard suggests a reconciliation of the two schools of thought, the potential of which Lee explores at the film's climax.

Ideologically, this reconciliation ignores some crucial aspects of both X and King's philosophy. Gone is the devout Christianity of King. Directly following Smiley's monologue we see Mookie (played by Lee), the film's hero, leave his apartment to be confronted by a white couple who are waiting at his doorstep. They proffer Christian literature and ask him if he has ever "thought about Jesus." Mookie yells "Hell no!" and pushes them aside. Mookie rejects both the white man's God and the false hope of Christian redemption that King represented. *Da Mook is too smart for dat shit*.

After this introduction to Mookie we are introduced to another crucial figure in the film, Radio Raheem. Raheem is obviously of the Malcolm X school: his T-shirt emblazons the motto, "Bed Stuy — Do or Die," reminiscent of X's "by any means necessary." (Bed Stuy is short for Bedford-Stuyvesant the neighbourhood in Brooklyn where the film takes place.)

Raheem carries his stereo wherever he goes and it is forever blasting "Fight the Power." The box is covered with Public Enemy stickers and this section of the script demonstrates Raheem's dedication to the band:

91. EXT: Street —Night

Buggin' Out sits down on a car next to Radio Raheem. As usual, his box is blasting [Public Enemy's "Fight the Power"].

BUGGIN OUT
How you be?

RADIO RAHEEM
I be. I'm living large.

BUGGIN OUT
Is that the only music you got?

RADIO RAHEEM

You don't like Public Enemy?
That's the dope shit.

BUGGIN OUT

I like them but you don't play anything else!

RADIO RAHEEM

I don't like anything else."

Raheem carries his immense stereo like its some kind of a burden, a standard as well as a cross he must bear. This burden relates directly, and is likely an homage to Public Enemy's song "Miuzi Weighs a Ton" which describes the weapons the group carries onstage as a necessary sacrifice, a weight difficult to bear yet a necessity. The song makes a virtue of that necessity:

I'm a public enemy but I don't rob banks
I don't shoot bullets and I don't shoot blanks
My style is supreme — number one is my rank
And I got more power than the New York Yanks¹⁰

Raheem himself is a cultural force in the community and the way he is introduced in the film is an attempt to demonstrate that influence. The filmic style is quite straight-forward until Raheem enters the picture. After we are introduced to Mookie, we have a traditionally framed medium shot of three youths sitting on a stairway when we hear the sound of Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" approaching. The action stops and the youths strike a respectful pose. Radio Raheem is approaching them. The introductory shot of Raheem is a canted wide-angle close-up of his face that has a bigger than life, almost surreal quality. His face is rife with suppressed rage. He is greeted by the group with flattering comments like "PE (Public Enemy) in the house!" and "He even walks in stereo!" Following Raheem's canted angle establishing shot, the film is filled with canted wide-angle close-ups that suggest a Hip Hop perspective and as Raheem leaves this scene he is told "It's your world," a common Hip Hop compliment that nonetheless suggests that the world *Do the Right Thing* describes is told from Raheem's revolutionary perspective.

The block has two cultural institutions: We Love Radio, the unifying voice of Bed-Stuy and Sal's Famous Pizzeria an Italian-American run restaurant that serves as cultural meeting place. At the end of the block are the Corner Men, the three unemployed men

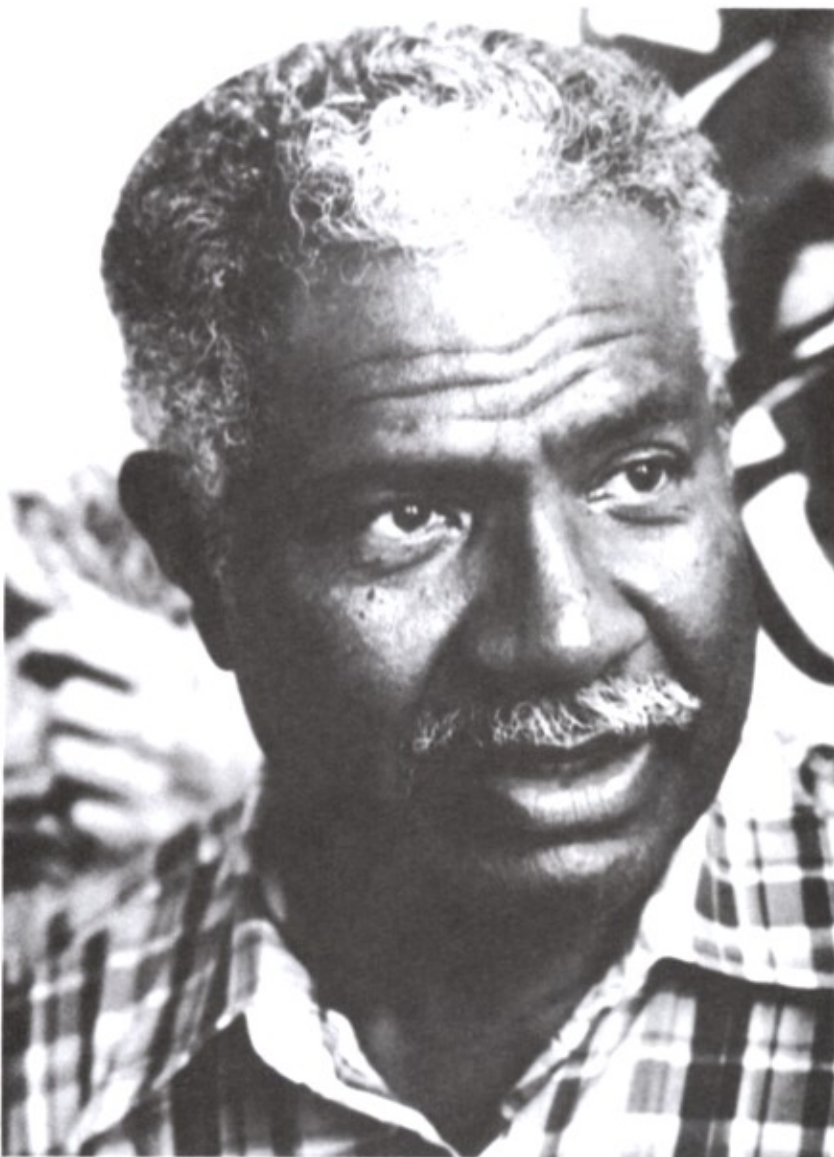
who act as a Greek Chorus, sitting on the corner observing all but mostly discussing their penises. Across from the Corner Men is a newly opened Korean owned fruit stand that is a source of resentment for many in the community who lack the capital to start their own businesses. Then there is Mother Sister who "is always watching"; she is the block's eyes and ears, there is nothing happening in Bed-Stuy that she is unaware of. And there is the Uncle Tommish Da Mayor/ Ossie Davis, the benevolent alcoholic who is symbolic of the turn-the-other-cheek school of bowing and scraping to the white man.

Mookie, the neglectful, misguided pizza delivery boy is friends with Buggin' Out/Giancarlo Esposito, the mischievous rabble rouser who initiates the trouble at Sal's Famous. According to Lee's character notes in the screenplay, both of these characters "like so many black youth today" are overly capitalistic and lack drive and vision.

Within Sal's Famous there occurs a number of racial conflicts. Sal/Danny Aiello is a knee-jerk racist; he has basically come to terms with his racism and has subjugated it with a genuine love for the blacks in the community and a paternal, quasi-sexual love for Mookie's sister Jade. Sal's sons Pino and Vito are struggling with their own racist background: the outwardly racist Pino is reacting against his own physical similarity to blacks as well as trying to maintain a neatly ordered hegemonic perspective; Vito is trying to remain loyal to both his fraternal obligations (which apparently include being suspicious of blacks) and his desire for acceptance by Mookie and other blacks in the community whose culture he admires.

Mookie's primary goal is "to get paid" with the minimum amount of effort. A subtextual theme that emerges is the threat to Mookie's blackness presented by his working at Sal's Famous. In the first scene we can overhear Mookie repeat twice in conversation with a customer (in reference to the unnamed subject of their conversation) "As Sal would say he's a Mama Luce." This sets up a conflict for *da Mook* who has become at least partially fond of Sal and his Italian idioms but who also feels obligated to maintain solidarity with his peers who are mostly at odds with Sal.

Both Mookie and Vito are individuals fond of the other race's culture. Mookie would be reluctant to admit it but his comfortable friendship with Vito as well as his begrudged love of Sal and his Italian culture (signified by his repeated homage, "Mama Luce") belies at least



Da Mayor/Ossie Davis represents the old school of bowing and scraping to the white man . . .

an understanding of the culture that the other brothers on the block regard with suspicion and scorn. It is easier for Vito to demonstrate his love for black culture because as a white male he loses none of his power or consciousness by embracing black culture. It is easier for a white man to go "slumming" in Harlem than it is for a black to head uptown to the Metropolitan Opera House. Embracing white culture is a head long dive into icy, hostile waters, potentially suicidal and certainly self-emasculating. It is also the worst form of sell out and Buggin' Out is worried that *da Mook* is going to take that option. After Mookie is ordered by Sal to escort Buggin' Out out of the pizzeria, Buggin' Out yells a warning to Mookie from the pavement: "Stay black!"

Buggin' Out is thrown out for

demanding that Sal include some black figures on his "Wall of Fame." Sal explains that it is an Italian-American establishment, hence Italian-Americans are featured on the wall. Buggin' Out campaigns to boycott Sal's but is greeted with indifference from the community. The Corner Men, who at the beginning of the film greet Sal warmly and admire his Cadillac, tell Buggin' Out that instead of boycotting Sal's Famous he should boycott the barber who "messed up your head." Mookie's sister Jade tells Buggin' Out that he should direct his energies towards something positive within the community. Only Radio Raheem and Smiley are willing to boycott Sal's and the three of them defiantly enter Sal's with Raheem's stereo blaring "Fight the Power."



"Yo Sal!" Mookie takes on Sal/ Danny Aiello, the gatekeeper of a cultural hegemony

Sal denies their entrance into his Pizzeria. On one level we can see Sal as symbolic of the philosophers in Plato's *Republic*, the gatekeepers of knowledge who wish to exclude the poets, represented in this case by Raheem and his box.¹¹ When Sal destroys Raheem's stereo (because Raheem refused to turn the volume down) he is attempting to close that gate. We can make this argument more potent by considering Sal as not so much a gatekeeper of knowledge but

the gatekeeper of cultural superiority, the beneficiary and 'endorsed spokesmen' of a hegemonic system that favours even white 'minorities' (such as Italians) over blacks. The Italian-Americans that adorn Sal's Wall of Fame are white minorities wholeheartedly accepted by the white mainstream: Frank Sinatra, Al Pacino, Robert DeNiro. The Afro-Americans Raheem *et al* want included on the wall (Michael Jordan, Martin Luther King

Jr.) are also esteemed by whites but with a qualification. As Pino explains to Mookie, blacks like Eddie Murphy, Michael Jordan and Prince are "Black but not really black, they're more than Black. It's just different."¹²

Public Enemy's theme "Fight the Power" also takes on the cultural hegemony by attacking white icons like John Wayne and Elvis Presley. In one interview, Chuck D explained that he feels alienated from John Wayne as a

cultural figure because he cannot identify with Wayne's recurring role as a functionary of American imperialism "slaying yellow people overseas." Elvis Presley is denounced in "Fight the Power" as a "Straight up racist/the sucker was simple and plain"; this is alluding to the quote often attributed to Presley, "The only thing niggers are good for are shining by shoes." This quote has been disputed by Elvis fans for years but regardless of its veracity, Elvis still represents a racist figure when one considers the millions he made from exploiting black folk music. Chuck D is reacting to the white cultural hegemony in the same way that Buggin' Out and Raheem are reacting; they are all tired of having white figures shoved down their throats and want black heroes to receive equal status. As Chuck D raps in "Fight the Power": "None of my heroes don't appear on no stamps."

Throughout *Do the Right Thing* we are being presented with a subtle moral commentary. Earlier in the film, Radio Raheem treats Mookie to the story of Love and Hate (Lee's homage to *Night of the Hunter*). The story is about "static" between two brothers love and hate who fight each other for dominance. Raheem has gold rings bearing on one hand 'Love' and on the other 'Hate' and he demonstrates this battle with each fist. In the end, Hate is KOed by Love. When Raheem is killed, he falls to the ground with the 'Love' hand figuring prominently in the shot. Mookie shouts "Hate" as he throws the garbage can through the window; Smiley pronounces "Apartheid" as "Apar-HATE."

On a political level we have the conflict between the concepts of non-violent and violent resistance raised by the killing of Radio Raheem. When the police choke Raheem to death the potentiality of mob violence emerges. As the police drive off with Raheem's body there comes over the crowd a murderous silence punctuated by shouts like "Just like Michael Stewart!" and "We ain't gonna stand for this Sal!" It is clear that Sal and his sons are going to be hurt. Da Mayor tries to intercede, he stands in front of the crowd and tells them to go home before someone gets hurt. He is appealing to the same moral sensibility that King preached but the crowd is not listening.

What are black people supposed to do? They've lost all faith in the judicial system. They've been seeing blacks get murdered for too long — Eleanor Bumpus on down — and the cops get away with it. I

have perfect sympathy with the character in my film, Mookie, who throws a garbage can through Sal's Famous Pizzeria window after the cops kill a black kid.¹⁴

The camera dollies in on Mookie who is sitting on a curbside, observing the action. He looks contemplative, as if devising a plan. Mookie springs into action, emptying a garbage can, carrying it towards Sal and throwing it through the window, screaming "HATE!" as he does so. The crowd bursts into action, looting and destroying Sal's. Smiley sets the place on fire and as the Wall of Fame catches on fire he pins up one of his postcards of Malcolm X and King shaking hands. Echoes of "Fight the Power" are heard and we see a canted, wide angle close-up of Smiley's face breaking into a smile for the first time in the film (his name is meant to be ironic as he never smiles).

There is a political dichotomy being explored here. However disparate, Lee is attempting to integrate both X and King's political philosophies. The film

ends with two quotes, one from X, one from King. King's quote preaches the importance of non-violence; X's quote comes second and asserts the importance of black self-defence, calling it 'intelligence.' Lee has declared himself of the X school, but what he is attempting to do here is collate King and X. From King we take the importance of non-violent resistance against the individual; from X we take the importance of fighting the institutions of racial hegemony.

We can read the climax as follows: Mookie recognizes that the crowd is out for blood and that Sal and his sons may be killed in the process. This will lead nowhere; killing Sal will not stop another Raheem from being killed. The functionaries of a cultural and economic hegemony killed Raheem; Sal was merely protecting his spot in a hegemony reluctant to let even Italians have a place. Mookie realized that the mob had two paths to vengeance: either murder Sal or destroy his business. The moral, intelligent choice was the latter. As an institution, Sal's Famous was an endorsed establishment of the hegemony.



Spike Lee plugging Nike, "the brand of choice for B-boys"

ony (we see the two Italian cops responsible for Raheem's death patronize Sal's earlier in the film) and for that reason the only possible revenge was to destroy it. Killing Sal would have merely led to what King would call a downward spiral of violence.

In Mookie's instigation of the burning of Sal's Famous we see a political move informed by both King and X. It is no accident that the author of this film played the onscreen instigator of the riot.

The beauty of *Do the Right Thing* is that we incorporated both Martin Luther King's view of non-violence and Malcolm X's view of the use of violence to combat racism. Malcolm X didn't even call it violence. Under certain circumstances, he says, it's protection and intelligence. Personally, I side more with Malcolm X. Most young black people today would.¹⁴

Afterword: Hopes For the Future

The problems in Hip Hop and in *Do the Right Thing* are not easily reconciled. It is nearly impossible to determine exactly where artists like Spike Lee or Public Enemy stand politically. Public Enemy will often play both sides, right and left, supporting both sides of sworn enemies like X and Elijah Muhammed, Eldridge Cleaver and Huey Newton. A pro-black activist supporting both Cleaver and Newton is as irrational as a Communist support-

ing both Lenin and Trotsky. This is not to suggest that Lee falls in the same trap, his support of X and King in *Do the Right Thing* is logically valid. Yet there are disturbing aspects to Lee's work: the music video he directed for Public Enemy's "Fight the Power," which was filmed during a pro-black march through Bensonhurst, makes the march look like a fascist assembly. And anti-semitism (charges of which Public Enemy have been unable to effectively combat) is suggested during the "dressing down" sequence in *Do the Right Thing*: when a member of each race in Bed-Stuy performs a monologue of racial epithets aimed at one particular group, including the Korean grocer who attacks Jews, no Jew is allowed to fight back. As a matter of fact there are no Jews to be found anywhere in *Do the Right Thing*. When considering the anti-semitism prevalent among certain Afro-American activists today this exclusion leads to an unfortunate conclusion.

Rap artists have frequently made homophobic and misogynistic comments in the lyrics of their songs. Some artists are quite innocuous, some extremely offensive and some equally progressive (note the "Native Tongue" clique which includes progressives acts like the Jungle Brothers, De La Soul and a number of female rappers). Thankfully, a current trend in Hip Hop is to celebrate women but a long way has still to be travelled before the pro-black consciousness expressed in Hip Hop today aligns itself with feminist, leftist and gay-rights activists. Interest-

ingly the militant gay activists ACT-UP have co-opted Malcolm X and his "by any means necessary" line; the possibility for alignment is there. It is basically up to the Hip Hop activists, those interested in starting a revolution through music and film, to realize the potential of such a coalition.

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5. Frank Owens, "Hip Hop — Be Bop" in *Spin* (1988), pg. 60-73.
6. Schooly D, "Same White Bitch (Got You Strung Out on Cane)" on *Some Some Kill*, (Philadelphia: Jive/BMG, 1988).
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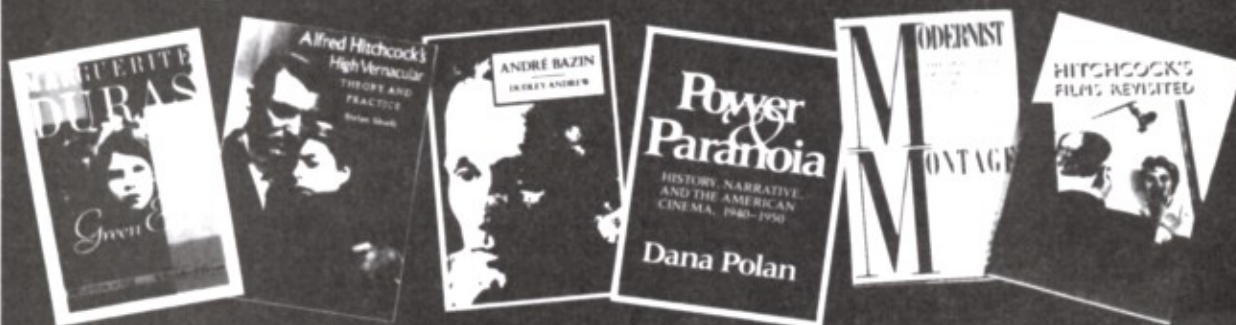
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Bette Davis 1908-1989